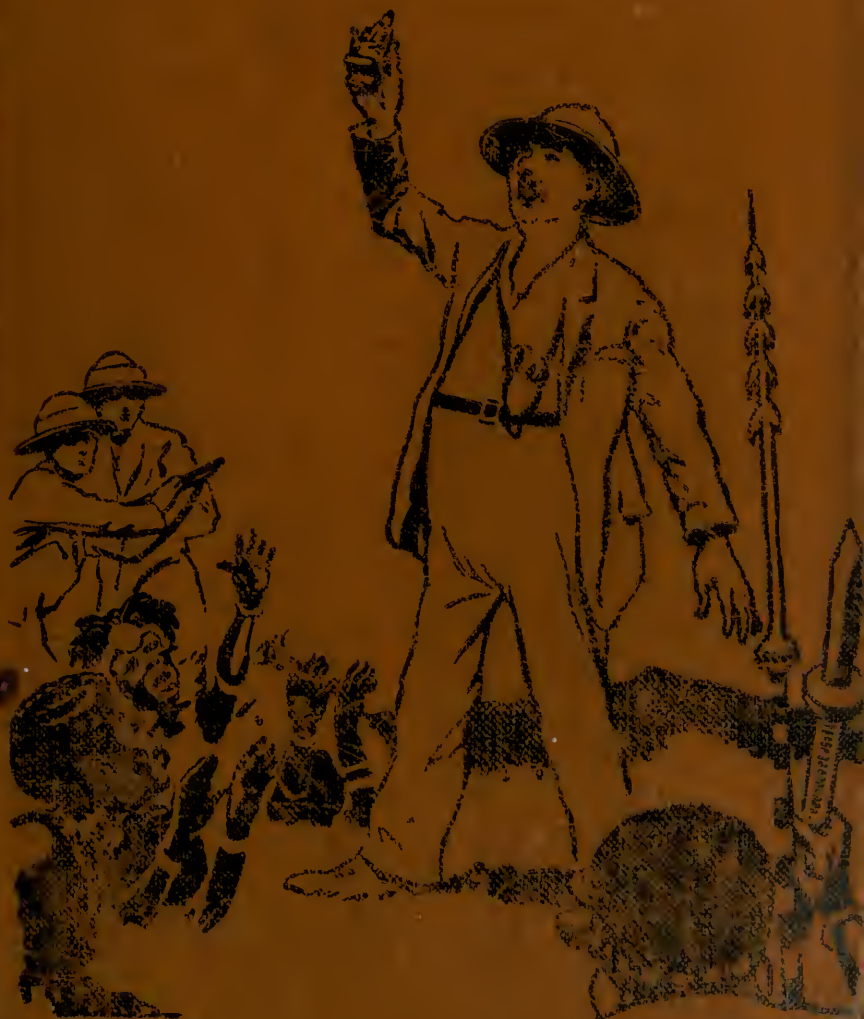


The IVORY IDOL

HUGH F. FRAME











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(3,320)

"Little ivory idol, you are opening up the way for me!"
(p. 171).

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by
Hugh F. Frame



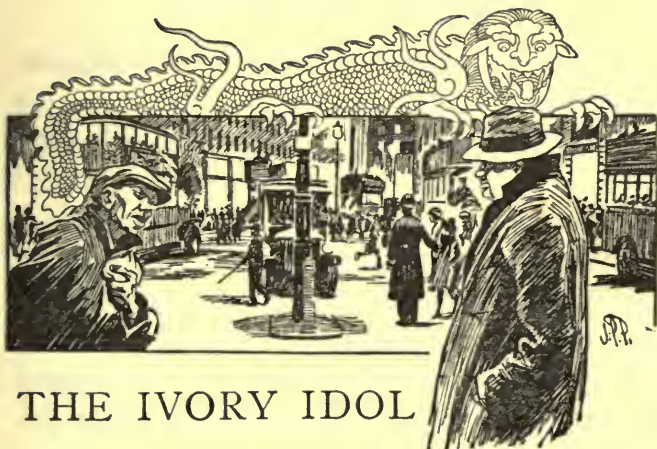
Illustrated by
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T. NELSON & SONS L^{td}.
London, Edinburgh, New York, Toronto & Paris

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THE IVORY IDOL

CHAPTER I

THE GREEN DRAGON

A BIG hulking man was standing on the kerb at Piccadilly Circus, puzzling his brains about how he was going to get the price of his next meal. He had just determined to try his hand at pick-pocketing, which was about the only form of crime he had never tried before, when a Chinaman sidled up to him from among the crowd and spoke to him in a low tone.

“ You Mistah Smith ? ”

The big man turned in surprise.

“ That’s my name all right. How do you know me ? ”

“ You want one hundred pounds, velly easy job ? ”

“ I could be doing with some hard cash.”

“ You come along with me.”

The Chink walked rapidly eastward, followed at a distance of half a dozen yards by Smith ; but neither of them spoke again till they were in a dingy apartment in Limehouse with the door locked and curtains closely drawn.

“ There is only one thing I want to know,” Smith was saying half an hour afterwards, when he had heard the scheme, “ Is the Green Dragon behind this business ? ”

The Chinaman’s eyes narrowed to a slit.

“ No savvy Gleen Dragon,” he replied.

“ I bet you do. If the Chinese secret society is behind this, it’s a big thing, and there should be lots of money in it.”

“ No savvy Gleen Dragon,” the Chinaman repeated imperturbably, and no one could have told whether he lied or not. “ You get one hundred pounds, Mistah Smith, velly easy job.”

“ Right, I’m on. All I’ve got to do is to

worm my way into this colonel's household, keep my eyes open for any cablegram he may receive, and give you a copy of it within twenty-four hours. And I get another hundred if I can put my hands on a red-coloured map of an island called Loompopo, which the colonel keeps hidden somewhere. Sounds easy, but how the deuce am I going to get a job in his house ? ”

“ You be servant-man. Plenty good papers here.”

He handed over to Smith a bundle of papers, which seemed to be testimonials recommending Mr. Charles Smith as an honest and efficient man-servant. The papers bore the signatures of two colonels and a general in the British army.

“ I'll get five years if the old boy finds out these are forged.”

“ He not savvy. These gentlemen all far away—India.”

“ But what if he has a man-servant already ? ”

The Chink's eyes glinted for a moment.

“ Him servant velly sick by-and-by.”

“ Jove, it does seem a big thing. Looks like

the Green Dragon ; but I'm on. I want some cash in advance."

The Oriental drew twenty crisp bank-notes from his pocket and passed them over.

"Get clothes, wash, hair-cut," he suggested ; and Smith laughed.

"Don't try to teach your uncle, Johnny. I was doing this before you were thought of, and I'm not surprised your society has heard about me. You may count the job as good as done when I take on to do it. You'll hear from me later on. Cheerio !"

It was only the next evening that things began to move in the little village of Throyton, where Colonel Stannard lived in Cherrywood House. The Green Dragon, with its headquarters in the Far East, extended like a giant octopus over the whole earth, and when it began to move one of its tentacles in Throyton, the first victim to suffer was old Biles, the colonel's servant.

He had finished his day's work, and was cycling into the village to have his usual pipe and pot of beer, when he met with an accident. At least, the newspapers called it an accident.

He was taking it easy when the chug-chug of a motor bike sounded on the road behind him, and he drew into his left side to let it pass. The bike suddenly quickened its pace, then at thirty miles an hour shot past the push bike, tipping its right handlebar and sending the old man hurtling into the ditch.

Two hours passed before he was discovered lying there with a broken leg, and the police had as much chance of catching the speed merchant as they had of catching the man in the moon. The colonel was purple with rage when he heard of the event, but neither his fiery language nor his offer of a reward could bring the unknown rider to justice.

Poor Biles could give no account of what had happened beyond saying, "I was going to Throyton, sir ; I hears one of them there motor cycles coming up behind, and I knows no more till I wakes up in the cottage 'ospital."

Four days later a man turned up in answer to the colonel's advertisement for a temporary servant. He bore excellent testimonials, had seen service in the army, and the colonel engaged him on the spot for six weeks' service. His

name was Charles Smith, and he had been unemployed since leaving the army.

Half of the six weeks passed in utter boredom for Smith. No cablegram came to the house, and though he poked into every likely place for a red-coloured map of Loompopo, he could find nothing. Hopes of earning one hundred pounds were fading away, when one afternoon he saw the telegraph-boy cycling up the drive. He opened the door to the boy and took the telegram to Colonel Stannard in the library. The colonel tore it open to read it.

"That will do, Smith," he said. "There is no answer."

"Very good, sir."

Smith went out and dismissed the boy. Half an hour later, when evening had fallen and the house was wrapped in shadows, he turned the handle of the library door gently and peeped in. If the colonel noticed him he was going to make some excuse about switching on the lights. But the colonel was seated deep in thought with his back to the door. For a moment the man at the threshold paused. Should he wait till later and try to steal a glance



Down with a crack on the colonel's skull.

at the cablegram? But at any moment the colonel might put it in the fire, and Smith's hopes of one hundred quid would melt away for good.

Like a panther creeping towards its prey, Smith tiptoed forward. One pace behind the unsuspecting gentleman he halted, slipped a

sandbag from his pocket into his right hand, and with the coolness of much experience brought it down with a crack on the base of the colonel's skull. Colonel Stannard crumpled up in his chair, and Smith pounced on the message lying on the table. In thirty seconds he had it copied.

"To Colonel Stannard, Cherrywood, Throymton, England. The Queen of the Fire Mountain remembers your promise."

Taking care to leave no finger-prints, Smith tilted the table on its side, threw open the window, and dragged down one of the curtains. Then springing to the switch he turned on the electric lights and rang the bell loudly for help.

"There has been a burglary," he cried excitedly as the maids ran in. "Phone for the police and the doctor, and get some one to help me upstairs with the colonel. Quick, we shall have to search the grounds. I almost had a hold of the man."

Long before the victim regained consciousness, Smith with the village policeman and several men had scoured the grounds thoroughly for the burglar. Every flower-bed had been

trampled down, every clump of rhododendrons beaten, but without success.

"I would know the man if I saw him again," Smith kept on repeating. "He was a little man in a blue suit and checked cap. Perhaps the colonel will be able to give us some clue."

But when the colonel came round he was very dazed.

"That you, doctor?" he asked feebly.

"Yes; you will soon be all right."

"Get Dick," he murmured feebly. "Phone to my boy Dick to come at once. He's—he's at Merryton College."

"To-morrow morning we shall phone to _____"

"Get Dick," the colonel bellowed, summoning up all his strength. "I want Dick, my boy, immediately. Get him."

CHAPTER II

DICK GETS GOING

DICK STANNARD was in the dormitory at Merryton College preparing for bed when the Head sent for him to tell him his father had become ill.

“It may not be very bad, Stannard ; I hope not. He has asked for you to go home, and you may leave to-morrow after breakfast.”

“Can I not go to-night, sir ?” Dick asked eagerly.

“The last train has gone. You need not worry too much,” the Head said kindly. “To-morrow will be soon enough.”

Back in the dormitory Dick broke the news to his pal, the Hon. Arthur Augustus Trepington, whose home was also near Throyton.

“I expect it is something serious, Gus,”

Dick remarked gloomily. "The guv'nor would not have asked me to go home if it weren't."

"Well, get your coat and start at once, old man."

"The Head says to-morrow morning will do."

"That's the kind of thing he would say. Have you never slipped down the rone-pipe for the fun of the thing? Can you not do it again for the guv'nor's sake? The Head will understand if he ever knows about it."

Immediately Dick was slipping a pair of old socks over his boots to give him a better grip of the rone-pipe, and when he stood up ready for the expedition he found that Gus had been doing the same.

"I am going to give you Bessie," Gus explained. "You should do the journey in two hours if the girl is pulling well."

"Look here, Gus, I can't——"

"Shut up, you ass, and get down the pipe. I'll be down in a tick after you."

Gus's father, Lord Trepington, had given his son a smart little two-seater sports model as a birthday present, and Gus kept it garaged in Merryton in a private lock-up. Every half-

holiday he and Dick spent in driving and polishing the little beauty. Dick's first words when he saw her had been, "She is not a tin Lizzie, Gus."

"No fear," Gus cried. "She's a little English beauty. We must call her Bessie," and that name had stuck.

It was almost eleven o'clock when Gus knocked up the garage man that night and told him to give Bessie a good drink.

"It's jolly decent of you," Dick was explaining to his pal.

"'S-sh," said Gus. "Hear how smooth she's running. Hop in, old boy, and the best of luck. Send me a wire to-morrow to let me know you've arrived safe."

"Right, I will. You can explain to the Head if he gets ratty."

The clutch slipped in gently, Bessie slid forward at a respectable 10 m.p.h. till the police station was passed, and turned into the main road. Out there, with a clear road visible in the moonlight, Dick opened the throttle and let her go.

Without knowing it, he had left his old

college for good, and many weird adventures lay before him before he would see dear old Merryton again.

Sharp frost made the road hard as iron and in some places slippery like glass, the Plough in the heavens shone bright, a keen east wind made beech leaves in the hedgerows rustle, but Dick had eyes and ears only for the road in front. Crouching over the wheel with eyes fixed intently on the pool of light cast by his headlights, he increased speed. Occasionally he glanced at the speedometer and saw the needle move round. Twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five miles per hour. Mowbray Towers passed like a flash, and when he swept past Hoggins' Copse he was touching forty-five.

Dick's nerves were like steel and his hand sure, and it was not till he was approaching Cherrywood House that he slowed down to take the corner at the lodge gates. Dr. Fenton was in the hall.

"What's wrong, doctor?" Dick cried, springing out.

"The colonel has rather a nasty head, Dick; you've surely come very quick."

"Anything serious?"

"We scarcely know yet. As soon as you have had supper——"

"I am going up now," was all Dick said.

Together they mounted the staircase and entered the colonel's bedroom. At once he opened his eyes and smiled faintly.

"Dick!" His lips framed the word though his voice was scarcely audible at first.

"Yes, sir. I have come. It's rough luck seeing you like this."

"Fenton, give me a dose of something that will help me to speak for a bit. A-ah! that's better. Now if you do not mind leaving us, I have a lot to say to my boy." As soon as the doctor had gone, Colonel Stannard put his hand under his pillow, drew out the cablegram, and held it out to Dick. "Read it."

Dick read the message twice. "The Queen of the Fire Mountain remembers your promise," then, looking up, he said, "It's meaningless to me, dad."

"I wrote that cablegram myself, Dick."

"You wrote it yourself?"

"Yes, ten years ago. I left it written on a

slip of paper in Loompopo, little thinking I would ever hear anything of it again ; but I promised the queen that if ever she needed my help a second time I would come from the other side of the earth to serve her. It arrived to-day."

"I don't understand, sir."

"That is why I sent for you—to explain. Listen. You know I was once His Majesty's Commissioner out east. Part of my work was to look after Loompopo, which has a native queen. Both the Japs and the Chinks had their eye on the island at that time, there was a little bit of a scrape, but I managed to stave the thing off. In return Queen Selulla—she was only a girl—gave me what in that place amounts to a knighthood, and dubbed me her Knight of the Fire Mountain. When my time was up I wrote this message which you see, gave it into the queen's hand, and told her to send it if ever she needed me. One of her men has carried it across the South China Sea and handed it in at the cable office at Singapore." Here the colonel had to pause from exhaustion

"And you cannot go, sir."

“ These yellow skunks will do all they can to keep me out of it. This knock on the head is their pleasant little way of announcing that I am not wanted. Now just press that nail on the wall where the picture is hanging, and lift down the picture gently.”

To Dick's amazement the panel behind the picture folded forward, revealing a secret cupboard which contained a strong box. His father opened the box and drew out several documents.

“ This is a map of Loompopo, Dick.”

It consisted of a sheet of ordinary paper with queer signs done in deep red pigment. At the top was a crude sketch of a cone-shaped mountain belching forth red flames. At the foot of the mountain the figures of several men lay about, each man with a red stream flowing from his severed windpipe.

“ It is not drawn to scale,” the colonel explained. “ But these figures I have marked at the top of the mountain are correct. Read them.”

“ The top figures are 43, beneath them is the figure 4.”

“ Right ; 43 is a compass bearing, 4 means four miles. These directions lead to a cave where the queen and I hid away the state jewels of Loompopo. They’re worth a million at least.”

Dick whistled softly.

“ For centuries the Loompopians raided Burma and Assam, and collected gold and jewels.”

“ Has the queen’s message to you anything to do with this treasure, sir ? ”

“ I don’t know. We were never sure whether the Chinese who came nosing around wanted the island as a military base or whether they had got wind of the treasure. They are sly as cats and as ferocious as tigers. All I know is that the queen needs help out there.”

“ When do you wish me to start for Loompopo, sir ? ” Dick asked the question suddenly, and his father’s face lighted up with pleasure and pride.

“ You are a brick, boy. I was hoping you would volunteer. A promise must be kept at all costs, especially a promise made to a native. I have ruled two million people single-handed,

and the only thing that kept them obedient was the fact that when I said a thing I did it. Go out there at once, Dick. Take this map and this diploma of knighthood, and play the game as I would have tried to do myself. Money has been placed at your disposal. Put the papers in a belt next your skin, and never part with them night or day."

"Shall I need this as well?" Dick asked, holding up a small ivory idol which he had found at the bottom of the box.

"Good heavens! I'd almost forgotten that—the ivory idol!" The colonel's voice had grown weaker, and the effects of the doctor's restorative seemed to be wearing off. But he made an effort to continue. "This idol will be the most powerful thing you carry with you. Let no one see it. It may clear an enemy from your path and open the way where you——"

Suddenly the colonel stopped speaking and stared intently at the door. The door had opened slightly. As Dick followed the direction of his father's eyes he too saw and dashed towards the door; but before he could reach it, Smith looked in.



" When do you wish me to start, sir ? "

" Beg pardon, sir ; shall I bring Mr. Dick's supper in here ? "

" No, confound it," roared the colonel. " Shut the door, Smith, shut the door." The manservant fled from the colonel's wrath, and Dick returned to the bedside. His father motioned him away.

"I am done up, boy; no more to-night. Leave the idol under the pillow, and I shall tell you the rest to-morrow. Good-night."

Dick's first thought was to sew the documents his father had given him, the chart of the island and the diploma of knighthood, into a belt. Then after seeing that Bessie was covered with a rug to keep out the frost he undressed, put the belt on next his skin, and tumbled into bed.

Only a faint grey starlight was filtering into his room when, sometime during the night, Dick suddenly awoke with the strange feeling that he was not alone in the room. Moving only his eyes, he peered round as far as he could; but could see nothing. And yet he knew the door was ajar, for a cold current of air was fanning his cheek. A floor board creaked, and, turning his head an inch, the lad saw on the wall the shadow of a man creeping towards his bed. The arm was outstretched. A faint whiff of chloroform came to his nostrils. With a sudden twist of his body Dick rolled out of bed on the far side and cried out, "Hands up, or I fire."

The man's figure slipped through the door-

way, and as Dick dashed after him downstairs, the hall door banged. Dick went no farther than the shrubbery, for he was quite unarmed and had nothing on except his pyjamas. But his belt was safe and the precious papers.

He was back in bed twenty minutes before he sat up again and growled to himself, "What an ass I am. There was no use wakening up the house, but I might have visited that new man's room. What was it dad called him—Smith? I better have a peep to make sure."

He got out and ran along the corridor to the man's room and tapped on the door. No reply. He tapped again and could hear the bed springs moving, then the man's sleepy voice spoke, "Who's that?"

"I want to come in, Smith," said Dick, and opening the door he asked, "How long have you been in bed?"

"Eh, what's wrong, sir? Is the colonel took worse? I've been sound asleep for hours. I'll get up."

"Don't trouble. I shall see you in the morning. Was it you who locked up last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"You forgot the hall door. I found it banging in the wind."

Dick's eyes had been busy while he spoke, but he could see no sign that the man had been out recently. His clothes were folded neatly on a chair by his side and he looked very sleepy.

"Don't worry at present, Smith ; we can see about it in the morning."

In the morning, after a cold shower bath and a vigorous rub down, Dick went to see his father, and met Dr. Fenton at the door.

"Good-morning, doctor ; what's the news ? "

"The colonel is done up. Too much talking last night. I have just given him an injection, and he must not be disturbed."

"I won't be long with him. He has only one thing to tell me."

"No, you don't, Dick." The doctor firmly held Dick's arm to keep him from going in.

"You must not. I will not allow it."

"I promise I won't speak to him."

"You're perfectly sure ? "

"Quite. When may I speak ? My business is very urgent."

"In two or three days perhaps."

“ Phew ! I can’t wait so long. When the guv’nor wakens up, doctor, tell him I have gone away to do what he told me. Now I shall just slip in quietly and get something I left behind last night.”

His father was sleeping deeply when he went in, breathing slowly but regularly. He would pull round all right, the doctor had said, if there were no intercranial hæmorrhage. They could not be sure for several days.

“ Good-bye, dad,” Dick whispered very, very softly. “ You would have been off by this time if you had been able to stand on a leg. And I’m off in your place. I won’t let you down, dad ; at least I’ll do my best, and I hope you’re here when I come back again. I’ll just take the ivory idol and go.”

The colonel still slept soundly with a look of deep contentment on his face, as if he were satisfied that he had given over his duty to safe-keeping. Dick stooped down and groped with his fingers under the pillow.

The ivory idol had gone !

CHAPTER III

THE HIDDEN HAND

FOR a moment Dick was at a loss what to do first. Two duties lay before him : he had to set out for Loompopo as soon as possible, but he had to get a hold of the ivory idol before he went. One thing he decided upon right at the start was that he would not call in the police to his aid. The police were deadly slow, and he would require to hang around to give evidence instead of getting away on his secret mission at once. He would fight his enemies single-handed. By the time he had swallowed breakfast he had made up his plans.

Taking Bessie out of the garage, he drove down to his father's bankers in Throyton, where he found that a generous sum had been put at his disposal. He drew fifty pounds in

cash and arranged for a letter of credit which would enable him to get money in almost any city in the world. Then he went to the telephone exchange for a trunk call to London to arrange berth accommodation on a P. & O. liner sailing for the Far East.

Coming from the office, he saw Smith on the other side of the street, the first time he had seen the man in daylight, and noticed what a huge individual the fellow was. Smith once had been a very strong man, though now he was running to flesh with a great paunch on him and with rolls of fat on his neck, which swelled out over his collar.

"I wonder what he is doing in the village," Dick thought to himself. "There can be no harm in watching where he goes to."

Sauntering into a doorway, Dick watched him ambling down the street till he came to the post office, into which he disappeared.

"I don't like that chap," Dick muttered. "But my nerves are all on edge this morning, and I must lie low with him a bit. But I'd give a lot to know if he really was listening at the gov'nor's door last night when we were

talking. I'll have a quiet talk with him as soon as we get back to Cherrywood."

It was almost twelve o'clock before Dick had all his business in the village completed, and he was hurrying home in the car when a figure stepped out from the footpath and yelled, "Hi, Dick, hi! Hold on a jiffy. Where the dickens have you been all morning?"

It was his chum Gus, the owner of the car.

"Where on earth have you sprung from, Gus?" he asked, pulling up.

"You chump, why did you not send that wire saying you arrived home safe? The Head gave us a skating holiday to-day, and I've had to spend it running home to see if you had come a cropper."

"Hop in, old man; I'm sorry I forgot the wire, but I want to have a pow-wow with you. No, not now—wait till we get home."

Gus had been Dick's pal for years, and he could be relied upon not to blab; so remembering that two heads are better than one, Dick told him about the Fire Mountain, Queen Selulla, and the commission his father had given him. When he had come to an end Gus

cried, "And why in the name of thunder are you not off? What are you messing about in my car for?"

"It's the ivory idol. I need to take it with me, though I did not have time to talk it all over with the pater. The thing has disappeared. That's what I must look for to-day."

Gus's face was grave, and he sat deep in thought.

"I see you don't trust this new man in the house," he said at length. "Of course, you have no evidence against him, so why not try bluff?"

"How?"

"Ring the bell and ask for Smith to come here. As soon as he comes ask him for the ivory idol. There's nothing like being plain and straightforward, my son."

"Not a bad idea," mused Dick.

He was just going to ring the bell when a knock came to the door, and the very man they were discussing came in.

"Excuse me," he said, "I am leaving this place."

The two chums stared at him in silence.

"There's queer goings-on in this house, and I'm mighty glad my time is about up," Smith continued. "This house is haunted something terrible."

"All right," said Dick calmly. "You can go ; but before you go you might give me that ivory idol."

Not for the slightest fraction of a second did Smith's face show that he understood.

"I beg your pardon, sir ; I do not quite understand."

"There has been a theft."

"A theft, sir. Shall I call up the police, sir ? "

"We shall not call the police," Dick said, and as soon as he had said it he could have bitten his tongue, for that statement gave away his game. "I am very busy at present, Smith ; I shall see you later." He was speaking quickly in the hope of covering up his mistake.

"You have my notice to leave"—a faint smile came over the man's face—"but if you need me——"

"Oh, run away, man, I'm busy."

"That's first innings to him," grinned Gus

as the door closed. "That old guy has brains, Dick, and he caught you on the hop that time."

"Is he guilty or not guilty?" Dick asked.

"He has bagged the thing, I should think. In the first place, he was very keen to give notice before doing the disappearing trick. That was so that you couldn't say he had run away. In the second place, he was anxious to learn whether you had called in the lads in blue. Now that he knows, he won't stick here much longer. But it's me for a sleep now; we are not like to spend much of our time in bed this blessed night."

Gus was calmly curling himself up on the couch for a sleep till Dick grabbed him by the coat and shook him.

"Get it off your chest, Gus; what's the game?"

The Honourable Arthur Augustus Trepington yawned.

"If I were you, old son, I'd bang a dollar and get Bessie filled up with petrol and get her frost chains on and keep your eye on old Fat Face. If he scoots off by train, I'll go. If he goes by car, you can follow him with Bessie. Now I am going to shut up like a little flower.

Call me early, mother dear." And in two minutes Gus, who had the wonderful gift of being able to snatch sleep at any odd moment, was in the land of dreams. Three things, Gus used to say, a man needed to keep fit : good food, a good bath, and a good sleep, and he always snatched them whenever he could.

It was growing dark when he awoke, and in the interval Dick had been busy making arrangements to track their quarry.

"Wakened up at last?" grinned Dick. "I've been fixing things up while you lay there snoring like a two-year-old."

"These were not snores, sonny," remarked Gus, stretching himself luxuriously. "These were thoughts chasing one another through my brain-pan, convolutions in the brain cells—something you know nothing about."

"What were you thinking?"

"I'm thinking it's time to have some grub. Nip along and have some of the needful sent up; nothing very much, you know—just a ham, a chicken, and one or two eggs to begin with. The London train is not till six, so we have a good half-hour yet."

Encouraged by his pal, Dick made a good meal and began to feel more fit for what might await him during the night.

"I'll let you know what happens," he said cheerfully.

"Think again. You won't need to let me know. I'll be there. A little trip to Loompopo will do me good; I am needing a change of some kind."

"Your guv'nor will be wild."

"He's in Africa shooting lions and things, so he will know nothing about it. Remind me to send him a picture postcard from Loompopo."

"You are a trump," Dick cried. "I was hoping——"

"That's all right. You might need me this trip, so I'm on. I'll eat my hat if we can't pull this thing off. And now if you are quite finished I'll be stepping along to the station to keep my eyes skinned for that blighter Smith. If we can keep in touch with him we may know the kind of thing we are up against, and the steamer doesn't sail for two days anyway."

Gus had chosen the station as his part of the

affair, because he was sure that Smith would go by train, so he groaned with disappointment a quarter of an hour later when he saw a big grey touring car sweeping up the London road followed close behind by Bessie. The big car had glaring headlights. Dick, knowing the road well, and hoping to remain unseen, was using only his side-lights. He had no time to stop at the station to pick up his pal, for success depended upon keeping the other car in sight.

When it was quite dark Dick switched on more light, and this seemed to give the show away, because the grey car put on speed.

"He won't beat Bessie," Dick muttered with determination. "She can do sixty, and these roads will give him trouble."

Evidently the driver of the leading car was finding the roads too tricky for fast driving, for he turned round to his passenger and cried, "I can't get away from him. He's driving a sports model, and the roads are like ice."

"Shake the puppy off somehow. That's your job."

"I'll break his neck for him."

Skimming up a little incline, Dick found to

his surprise that the lights in front had disappeared.

“Hallo, he’s turned off somewhere. They can’t be making for London after all.” Slackening speed, he halted at a cross-roads and got out to pick up the trail. “Hang it, he’s pushing on in the dark while I’m looking around like an old hen going to lay an egg.”

He jumped into his seat and, moving to the centre of the road, pressed on the accelerator. Bessie responded like a thoroughbred. Thirty miles an hour and the wind whistled past the windscreen ; forty, and tyres were biting into the frozen road, thanks to the chains. On a straight stretch of road Dick let her all out, till on turning a long winding corner, where he eased off speed a bit, his lamps revealed an old farm cart drawn right across the road. Knowing it was fatal to jam on his brakes too quickly, he skilfully checked Bessie’s career, but too late. Crash, she went into the cart. Her bonnet wrinkled up like a concertina, she turned a semi-somersault, and sent Dick flying over the hedge into a manure heap.

As he fell a man darted towards him, but

Dick was too quick for him. To defend the precious documents in his belt he drew a revolver, which fortunately he had brought with him, and fired at his assailant. Unluckily the fall had shaken him so much that his shots went wide, but he heard the man cursing as he ran off. The grey car's lights were turned on again, and Dick had the mortification of seeing her red tail lamp disappearing into the distance.

"The dirty dog," groaned Dick. "He did not care if he killed me, and he certainly has killed Bessie. But here is another car coming; I must pull them up before they have a crash."

Limping towards the oncoming vehicle, he waved his flashlamp and the car pulled up.

"That you, Dick?" a well-known voice cried.

"It's you, Gus?"

"Sure. Where's Bessie?"

"Come and have a look."

Gus had not blubbered for years, but he almost blubbered when he saw his beloved pet lying with her nose smashed in.

"Where is the rotten hog who did this?" he demanded.

“ Five minutes ahead.”

“ Then give a hand to clear the road, and I’ll—oh ! come on and let’s get after them.”

“ What car have you got ? ”

“ A real old tin Lizzie. I got it at Throyton garage when I saw you passing. We may catch them yet. But it’s war to the knife now, sonny boy. These chumps are taking things too seriously for me, and I think I’ll get ratty at them soon. Poor old Bessie, there will never be another like you again ! ”

Pushing on recklessly, they soon had the satisfaction of spotting the grey car in front again just as they were passing through the suburbs of London. The heavier traffic of the city gave them their chance of keeping up close without arousing suspicion. The grey car went right through the heart of the city, turned east, then south, then east again, passing through a maze of streets till the lads lost all knowledge of their locality.

“ Do you think they have spotted us ? ”

“ Not likely, but they are playing for safety. Hallo, they are stopping. We’ll get round the next corner.”

Leaving the tin Lizzie by the kerb, Dick and Gus peeped cautiously round the corner and saw Smith descend. The grey car slid off. Smith went to a house door and let himself in with a latch-key. Dick and Gus, keeping in the shadow, moved down towards the house.

"How about going in?" Gus whispered.

"'S-sh, steady on. There's somebody coming down the street."

They quickly flattened themselves in the shadow against the wall and watched the man who was approaching. The light of a street lamp fell on his face as he turned and glanced up and down to see if the coast was clear. He went forward to the house into which Smith had disappeared, gave three gentle taps with his fingers, and the door almost immediately opened for him. When it had closed again behind him, Dick turned to his chum, "Did you see his face, Gus? My aunt, he's a blooming Chinaman."

"We've got to know what is happening in this house," said Gus softly. "It's a bit risky, but I am going to chance it. Stay here and keep a look-out, Dick."

“ You don’t catch me missing the fun. If we can break out of school we can break in here.”

Their school education had not been completely wasted, for both set to the task before them without any fuss. Climbing over the area railings, they dropped down into the area and slipped off their boots. Shinning up a rone-pipe was easy after their long practice at Merryton, and in a trice Gus slipped his knife in under the sash of an upper window and pressed back the catch. Raising the window slightly, he strained his ears to listen. Voices could be heard indistinctly in a lower room. Gus boldly opened the window and crept in. Next minute Dick was by his side and the window was closed.

“ Should we not leave it open for our get-away ? ” Gus whispered.

“ It might be seen from the street. I’ve got a revolver. There won’t be any get-away.”

There seemed to be no furniture in the room, and groping round the wall they found a door. The place was pitch dark. Inch by inch Dick drew the door open, stepped in, and almost

knocked out his front teeth on the edge of a cupboard shelf. Gus grinned in the darkness when he heard his pal's smothered exclamation. "Don't spoil the woodwork, you ass," he whispered. "Here is the proper door over here."

They crept down the staircase to a door which showed a light at the bottom, and Dick put his eye to the keyhole. The room was destitute of furniture. In the centre of the floor Smith and the Chinaman sat on a couple of old boxes, talking together. Every word they said could be heard distinctly.

"Is that all you learn?" the Chink was saying.

"What more do you expect? We know the queen has sent the telegram. She must be getting jumpy about the business out there. Colonel Stannard cannot go. His son is going in his place. What more do you expect?"

"Papers?"

"I am going to get them on the way out."

"You go where way out?"

"Ah, you don't get me napping. I'm too old a bird for that game. Say what you like,

the Green Dragon is in this, and I am in it too. I am going to deal with the chief himself. Have you ever seen this before ? ”

The Chinaman's face remained impassive as Smith held out before him the ivory idol. The Chinaman put out his hand for it.

“ No fear, I am hanging on to this. I give it to nobody but the chief, and that will be on my terms.”

“ Me no savvy.”

“ I savvy all right. Colonel Stannard says it will clear any enemy from the path and open up the way. It seems to be a great charm to work with Queen Selulla. Are you going out east, Yellow-Face ? ”

“ Me go. You are pelhaps, me no savvy. Boy not go.” The Chinaman spoke with fierce intensity.

“ We had to do all in our power to keep the colonel at home. We have him fixed. Now it's the turn of the young 'uns. If they're asking for trouble they will find it. They will never see Loompopo.”

Dick and Gus crept back into cover as the Chinaman suddenly rose up and said good-

night. They could have touched him as he passed by them towards the main door and let himself out. As soon as all was clear Dick peered into the room again. Smith was sitting holding the ivory idol close to the candle to examine it. Dick stepped into the room and remarked calmly, "Hands up, Smith. Sorry to trouble you."

Smith jumped to his feet.

"How the devil——?"

"Put them up and keep them up. Now I'll trouble you to hand over that bit of ivory in your hand."

The man seemed about to spring at them.

"Please be careful," Gus suggested. "Shooting will make such a mess on the floor. You have twenty seconds to decide. Hand over the goods or Dick will wing you, and we shall charge you with the attempted murder of Colonel Stannard. One—two——"

"I'll give it up," said Smith sullenly.

"Put it on that box and then step back."

Smith stooped to the box, brought his hand down smash upon the candle, and charged like a wild bull. Gus was bowled over, and, thump-



"Hands up, Smith."

ing his head against the wall, remembered no more. When he came to himself he was alone. Reeling down the stairs, he was about to seek help from the first passer-by when Dick came limping back along the street.

"The beastly rotter got clean away. I was frightened to fire in the darkness, and he hacked me on the shins with his big boots."

"We have to pay for our knowledge," Gus said dolefully. "But we have learned a lot. By the way, it would be deuced awkward if a bobby happened along and found us in this empty house. Get our boots, old man; my head is going round like a top."

“ They’re prepared to swing for it to keep us out of that island, Gus.”

“ They’ll jolly well swing if I ever get into it. I expect we shall come across these two freaks on the liner long before that. There seems to be a whole nest of them.”

When they left the empty house and went to get their tin Lizzie they found it had gone.

“ Seen an old car anywhere about ? ” Gus asked a policeman about a hundred yards farther on.

“ One passed a minute or two ago,” the man answered.

“ That’s all right, officer,” Gus replied. “ We were just wondering if our old man had gone home before us.” And in a low tone he added to Dick, “ Smith has not only got brains. He’s got a dashed cool cheek.”

As they made their way on foot back towards the centre of the city in search of an hotel where they could spend the night, Gus suddenly said to his pal, “ Do you think you could run with that game leg of yours ? ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Don’t look round, but there are two men

shadowing us. Smith has wasted no time in putting some of his filthy gang on our track. They are all out to get that map from you, and the first dark corner we come to I expect they will try to knock you on the head. Shall we do the disappearing trick ? ”

“ It might be better.”

“ Then here’s our chance. Come on.”

They bolted through the close of a tenement they were passing, scrambled on to the roof of a wash-house, and, dropping into a narrow lane, ran for their lives to a street where they hailed a taxi.

“ We’ve shaken them off this time,” panted Gus.

“ They will soon be after us again,” Dick said, “ unless we can get the next blow in first. It is just about time we were giving Smith a dose of his own medicine.”

CHAPTER IV

THE CHUMS GET ONE OF THEIR OWN BACK

DICK and Gus had only one clear day before they were due to sail on their quest from Tilbury, and part of that day they spent in London getting their kit, returning for their last evening to Throyton to see if Colonel Stannard was able to give them any fresh directions. But the colonel was still unconscious, and so it was up to them to make their own plans.

One thing at least they had now learned. They were fighting not one man, but a whole gang, who were dogging their steps at every turn, and who would not stop at murder to steal Dick's map and to keep the chums out of Loompopo. They even knew the name of the gang—the Green Dragon. But as yet they

had not guessed that it was one of the most powerful secret societies of criminals in the whole world, with its agents everywhere. All they could do was to keep their eye on Smith, and try to bag the ivory idol from him at the first opportunity, knowing at the same time that he was keeping his eye on them, and would try to steal Dick's papers as soon as he could.

They had not long to wait for the gang's next move. On the day for embarking on the liner Dick and Gus caught the morning express to London, tipped the guard to give them a compartment to themselves, and began the first stage of their adventurous journey. When they arrived in London, the great railway terminus was busy as a beehive with a crowd swarming out of the train and another crowd swarming to get in. All was bustle and confusion, and Dick and Gus found themselves caught between two currents of passengers. They bore it all with good humour till Gus had to remonstrate with one man who jostled him.

"Look here, my man," Gus remarked smilingly, "do you mind taking your elbow out of my ribs?"

"Sorry, sir ; there's such a crowd."

"It's quite all right, but your elbow is confoundedly sharp."

"Bit sharp yourself, ain't you ?"

"Don't let 'im sauce you, Jim," one of the man's friends chipped in. "For 'eaven's sake get a move on." Saying this, he pushed with all his might, and for a moment Gus saw red.

"Hold this bag, Dick ; two can play at the shoving game."

"Never mind them. Here's a way out, and I think I can see a taxi. Hi, taxi !"

"Yessir. Tilbury docks. Very good, sir."

In the taxi Gus straightened his tie and said what he thought of the way crowds jostled and pushed a tender-hearted sweet little boy like him. Dick grinned.

"I am thinking you gave as good as you got, and after all it takes two to make a push. But here we are at the docks' gate. We shall soon be safely on board now, and no word from friend Smith so far."

Getting out, he groped in his pocket for money to pay the driver, and immediately his face fell and he gasped with horror.

"My pocket has been picked, Gus. I haven't a bean left and our tickets are gone."

"Great Jerusalem, sold again. These swabs at the station did this. Wait a jiffy. Great Aunt Jemima! they have cleaned me out as well."

"I want ten and a tanner," remarked the taxi-driver.

"It's our tickets we're worrying about. Sprint along to the superintendent's office, Dick, and see about it. We must sail."

"Nobody sprints from here till I get my ten and a tanner. I have heard these yarns before, but you are not selling me a pup this time."

"Hang your ten and a tanner. It's our——"

A policeman suddenly appeared on the scene and asked what was wrong. After their explanation they all went along to the shipping office, but there an official shook his head decisively. If they had no tickets and no passports they could not sail, not under any circumstances. The policeman was beginning to write in his notebook when another taxi drew up, and at the sight of the occupant Dick forgot himself and

cried out, "There's Smith. Arrest that man, constable. He's behind all this."

"Shut up, Dick," cautioned Gus. "We cannot go into all that."

The policeman, stepping across to Smith and noticing his expensive fur coat, saluted and asked politely, "Beg pardon, sir; do you happen to know these young gents?"

Smith calmly put on his glasses and beamed on the little group. "Why, it is you, Dick. It is all right, officer. This is the son of my old friend Colonel Stannard, and this is Lord Trepington's son. I have just come from their place. Have you youngsters been arranging another of your practical jokes?"

"I want ten and a tanner," the driver repeated.

"That's all right. Here's a pound for your trouble." Smith at the same time slipped a note into the policeman's hand. "Say no more about it, officer; they have been having a little merriment before seeing me off. Good-bye, boys."

Smiling blandly, Smith held out a podgy hand, and, to Dick's amazement, Gus took it



" Do you happen to know these young gents ? "

and said, " Good-bye, Mr. Smith ; we won't be happy till we see you again. Good-bye. Three cheers for Mr. Smith."

Both Dick and Smith were surprised at the turn events had taken.

" Come on, Dick, and shake hands with Mr.

Smith. Here, sir, let me clap you on the back for all you have done for us. He's a jolly good fellow, fellow, fellow."

Taking hands they both began to dance round, singing, while the other passengers smiled broadly at the boys' enthusiasm, till somehow or other Gus darted forward to take a last affectionate farewell, his foot slipped, and he stumbled against the red-faced butler. That gentleman was standing near the edge of the dock, whither Gus had manœuvred him. He overbalanced, clutched wildly at the empty air, and with a squeal of terror dropped into the murky water below.

Immediately everybody began to shout at the same time.

"Help, help! There's a man in the water. Boat ahoy, there's a man in the water." Above them all Gus could be heard, "Oh dear, oh dear, save Mr. Smith—he's being drowned."

There was absolutely no danger, and in a minute or two a boat had been rowed to the scene of the accident, and Smith, blowing like a whale, with cascades of oily water streaming from his clothes, was heaved unceremoniously

into the stern of the boat. Forgotten in the excitement of the moment, Dick and Gus were hugging each other and laughing till the tears ran down their cheeks.

"These boys are rascals," one man cried.

"No, no," said a dear old lady. "It was an accident. They are so high-spirited. Look at that poor boy crying about it."

Gus certainly was wiping the tears from his face with his handkerchief. Here the policeman, not forgetting that Gus's father was a real live lord, intervened and said, "Now you young gents had better be going. Mischief enough for one day. Next time watch that your larking doesn't go too far. No, you can't see Mr. Smith again to apologize: he's being taken on board for a dry change. Here's your taxi still waiting for you." He bundled them in and slammed the door.

"Have they any dibs to pay me with?" the driver asked suspiciously, and the bobby winked to him.

"They're rolling in it. All that chaff about not being able to pay was their idea of fun. They are the real thing and no mistake."

“Right-o ! I thought they looked like swells.”

Within the car the two chums leaned back upon the cushions and roared with laughter.

“Ha-ha-ha ! Oh, Dick, to see the old buffer flop over the edge——”

“Did you see him grab at nothing ? And that squeal of his. But I say, Gus, you weren’t frightened you’d get jail for it.”

“No fear. Smith can’t give us in charge, just as we can’t give him. None of us has any time to spare with a law case, and I owed him one for what he did to Bessie. You almost spoiled it by wanting to accuse him of theft.”

“I wanted to get the ivory idol. Now he’s off with it, and we are left.”

“Not left so far behind, old man. Our luggage has gone on that liner, and we soon shall be with it.”

“We can easily renew our passports and get more money, but I don’t see how we can have time to sail now. There is not another boat for a week.”

“What about flying after him ? ”

“Jove, I didn’t think of that. We can fly

from Croydon to Paris, get the express to Marseilles, and arrive there before the ship. Smith will get a surprise when we walk on board, and this time we can make the ivory idol our own."

"You still have the maps?"

"Sure. They can't pick them as easily as they picked my pocket."

As soon as they had replenished their supply of money they got in touch with Croydon to arrange an air trip, little dreaming that their enemy knew of their fresh plans within the next hour, and that the Green Dragon was as powerful in the air as it was on land or sea.

CHAPTER V

SERGEANT ONE-EYE

HOAR-FROST lay on the grass, and the airman's greatest enemy—fog—lay over the aerodrome at Croydon when Dick and Gus motored out to the flying-ground to get on board for Paris. The landing officer was a busy man that morning seeing that ground flares were burning brightly, keeping in touch by wireless with machines due to arrive, and hunting up spare pilots to replace those whom the fog had prevented from arriving to begin their day's duties.

"Must you go now, or can you wait till the fog has lifted?" he asked Dick and Gus.

"We should like to get off as soon as possible. We have to catch a train connection in Paris," they told him.

"Then I can fix you up, I think. You two will be the only passengers. We were short of a pilot, but I have managed to get hold of a man."

Wrapping themselves in thick leather coats lined with fur, they climbed into their seats behind the mechanic. After a minute's delay their pilot made his appearance, a short, thick-set man muffled up to the ears and wearing goggles.

"Climb above the fog," the officer advised him.

"Right. Start her up."

The engines had been running ten minutes to get warm under the direction of the mechanic, who had stopped them again. At the word of command from the pilot they roared into life again, and the machine began to taxi over the ground, bumping gently as it got up speed. Then the bumping ceased and they were clear of the ground. In the fog Dick and Gus could see nothing, and therefore had no sensation of climbing till after five minutes the sun began to struggle through the fog, or so it seemed to them, though in reality it was they who were

mounting through the fog into the clearer air above. When they were in bright sunshine they looked over. As far as the eye could see, great mountains of mist rolled beneath them, shutting out all view of the earth beneath. They were in a world of their own, vast, mysterious, and empty.

It was not till they were half-way over the Channel that they caught their first glimpse of the sea.

"Feeling squeamish?" Dick yelled, and in reply his chum held out his hands with the thumbs upwards. It was "thumbs up" as far as Gus was concerned.

But the pilot seemed to have been waiting for good visibility only before beginning some little plan of his own. Taking his slate, he wrote a message on it, passed it to the mechanic, and signed that he should give it to the passengers. Though neither of them had ever won a prize at school for French, they knew enough of the lingo to understand the message scrawled in French on the slate.

"Donnez-moi la carte de Loompopo, ou je vais vous tuer." It was brief and to the point,

so that they would understand the fateful words, "Give me the map of Loompopo, or I am going to kill you."

Almost before they had time to take in the full significance of the message the pilot was glaring round for their answer. They were thousands of feet above the sea, completely in the power of one, perhaps two, of the most desperate villains at large. Nothing could be easier than cold-blooded murder in the circumstances. But Dick did not hesitate for a moment. Filling his lungs, he yelled at the pitch of his voice, "No !"

Suddenly the plane nose-dived and fell plumb like a stone. The wind shrieked horribly through the stay-wires as they hurtled down, down, down, and the sea rushed up to meet them. In a moment they would crash. Instinctively the two chums closed their eyes and waited ; but next minute, when nothing happened and they opened their eyes, they saw not the sea, but the pilot's figure outlined against the sky. They were going up again. At an immense height the pilot began a new series of stunts, side-slipping, falling, looping the loop,

till Dick and Gus could not tell which was sea and which sky. Dick's face became green, and he felt he was in for a bad attack of air-sickness ; but his nerves did not fail, and he was determined to die if need be in defence of his papers.

"Donnez-moi la carte," another message came.

Gus, searching for some way out, began to put two and two together. He knew the pilot would not crash them, for that would mean death for himself. He was just trying to frighten them into surrender. But why had he written the message in French ? Like a flash a possible answer came to Gus. The pilot did not want the mechanic to understand. The mechanic was not a member of the gang. To test his theory, Gus leaned forward towards the mechanic and bawled in his ear, " Stop him. He's gone mad."

The broad grin on the man's face faded away as if by magic.

" Mad ? " his astonished eyes queried.

Gus tapped his head significantly and nodded.

" Then you don't want these stunts ? "

“No.”

The mechanic turned to the man at the joystick to expostulate with him, and his turn saved his life, for the pilot's hand, with an ugly knuckle-duster concealed in his glove, missed his jaw by only a hair's breadth. Men in the air have to act quickly or die. With two great horny hands the mechanic seized the other man by the throat and began to choke the life out of him. The machine swayed in sickening fashion while the short struggle lasted ; but when the pilot's figure became limp, the mechanic climbed into his seat and took control.

“Drag him back,” he cried, loosening the straps, and Dick and Gus yanked their unconscious enemy back into the body of the plane beside them. Meanwhile their new friend had descended to a lower altitude in search of a landing-place on the French coast. Volplaning in graceful spirals, he at last found a field which seemed to suit his purpose, and in a short time they had come to rest on the grass.

“Strike me pink,” were the mechanic's first words. “We all nearly snuffed it that time. Why the blankety-blank didn't you

tell me sooner that this lad had gone off his chump ? ”

“ Why did you not see for yourself ? ”

“ I didn’t know what the deuce he wrote on that slate. It looked like some mad lingo, but how was I to know ? Often blokes coming across ask us to give them a thrill or two. And there was I sitting grinning like a blessed fool and us nearly going west every blinking minute. I wonder what made him go balmy.”

“ Don’t you know him ? ”

“ Not me. We don’t always fly with the same pilot, and I’ve never seen this lad before. But he knows his job. He could almost make this old bus climb a tree and pick coco-nuts. And him balmy too ! ”

“ Look here, mechanic, this fellow is showing signs of waking up,” said Dick, “ and to be perfectly frank with you he is no more mad than we are. My chum and I are carrying certain things of value, and this man must be one of a gang of crooks after us. Thought he could bully us into meekly handing over the goods. Your readiness has saved us, for we might have given in.”

"No blooming fear, not you. I never saw amateurs who stuck the thing so well; I thought you were enjoying it. I don't know what to do with him now. I'm hanged if he goes up with us again, and there's no use our hanging about here."

While they were speaking, a motor-car on the road a quarter of a mile away was sounding her horn in one long note followed by two shorts—"Pom, pom-pom! Pom, pom-pom!" Looking in the direction where the sound was coming from, they took their eyes off the pilot, who suddenly recovered from his faint, sprang to his feet, and rushed across the field towards the car.

"Nab him," called the mechanic, and without thinking they all ran after him in close pursuit.

"Halt, hands up!" Two men appeared over the hedge and rapped out the command.

"We're trapped," cried Dick; "get back to the plane. Run for it." A bullet whistled past his ear. "Come on, boys, run."

A revolver is deadly at thirty yards, but beyond that the target has a good chance,

especially if the target is running to beat all records for the quarter-mile. Dick and Gus with their new ally reached the plane in safety.

“Start her up.” The mechanic needed no urging, and when the propeller began to whirl round, Dick, who was the only one of the trio still on terra firma, looked back. A big man with a round red face was taking deliberate aim at the mechanic’s head from twenty yards’ range. Dick grabbed a huge flint stone from the ground. Taking a short run, he put all he knew of bowling into his aim, and hurled the stone full in the man’s face. It caught his middle stump, and his bulbous nose must have been flattened. He was bowled clean out. Then as the plane moved forward, Dick jumped for it on to one of the wings, scrambled along, and was pulled in by Gus. Several shots in quick succession whistled through the fuselage. Gus waved his handkerchief to signal a wash-out, and before the men had time to reload the aeroplane was two hundred feet up and in safety.

“Have any of you lads got a gun?” the mechanic asked them.

“We have a Webley with us.”

“ Then have a pot at them.”

“ No, no,” cried Dick. “ We won’t use it unless we are cornered.”

“ Empty your magazine into their empty car as I plane down to it.”

None of the men on the ground saw the game till it was all over. As the machine glided slowly round the deserted car, Dick leaned far over the edge and sent six shots into her. The car’s windscreen was shattered and the bonnet riddled like a watering-can.

“ That’s the stuff to give them,” grinned the mechanic. “ Now it’s us for Paris, and they can stick there till they save up the price of a new engine.”

It was a very fortunate move for them that they had disabled the car, because their own engine soon began to develop trouble, and they were making scarcely any way.

“ What’s up now ? ” muttered the mechanic. “ Oh, I see. The petrol feed pipe is leaking. I expect a bullet has nicked it. If I could only get at it with a bit of insulating tape. Could any of you keep the plane steady while I get over ? ”

Dick himself grabbed the tape. Holding it

between his teeth, he swung himself out on one of the wings and clung for his life as it rose and fell in the wind. Far beneath him the roofs of a village seemed to whirl round and round, and he became giddy. For a second he closed his eyes and made up his mind not to look down again or he would drop. Then gripping the edge of the wing with his toes he let go with his hands and, lying flat on his stomach, began to wind the tape around the leakage. The engine brightened up at once. Numb with cold, though covered with perspiration, the plucky lad crawled back along his precarious perch to where Gus waited with a helping hand. An hour later they were on the aerodrome outside Paris.

"I want to shake your hand for that," cried the mechanic as soon as the engine stopped. "Strike me pink, it was the pluckiest thing I've ever seen. Shake, old chap."

"Oh, shut up." Dick was blushing like a schoolgirl. "I was dreadfully funky, and you had saved us to-day already. By the way, we do not know your name yet. Mine is Dick Stannard. This is Gus Trepington."



"Are you plane No. BI6I?"

"My mother used to call me Harry Eyton, but I've got a lot of other names. Sergeant One-Eye they used to call me in the army,

because I always had an eye on the main chance. If you want rum, grub, or a fag, keep your eye on One-Eye. Call me anything you like, so long as you don't use bad words."

Two gendarmes with a British official had come over the aerodrome ground towards them.

"Are you plane No. B161?"

"That's us," said Sergeant Eyton.

"Then we apprehend you and place you under arrest. We have had a wireless message from Croydon: 'Plane No. B161 left for Paris at 8.55. Pilot found later unconscious in hangar. Arrest all on board.'"

"We were expecting something like that," said Eyton calmly. "But the cops are hours behind once more. If you search the coast roads you may find a car with daylight let into her engine, and a man with a face like a squashed tomato. That's the man you're looking for. My friend here, Dick Stannard, will give him another lesson in bowling whenever he likes."

"You will have to come with us till this is cleared up."

"Anything to oblige, old chap; we don't mind.

I've seen enough flying to serve me for a week or two."

The gendarmes ranged themselves beside Dick and Gus, and the little group moved off across the flying-ground *en route* for the inside of a French jail.

CHAPTER VI

THE NIGHT EXPRESS

“THE one good thing about being in quod is that you get your grub for nothing,” Harry Eyton remarked cheerfully as they sat together in a plainly-furnished room attached to the prison and consumed a first-rate breakfast. “Only I hope you two are not in a hurry. When these froggy gendarmes begin to investigate it sometimes takes them weeks.”

Dick Stannard was downhearted.

“We have been trying all along to keep clear of the law, and here we are. That skunk Smith sails away, the Green Dragon gets busy, and we are left here anchored. I’m not going to stick this longer than to-day. I must get that steamer.”

“Cheer up,” cried Gus. “We shall get it

all right, and we can't be in a better place than this. I'm quite happy."

Dick looked in surprise at his chum, and Gus explained.

"We are not arrested for any crime. We are being kept for a few hours while inquiries are being made about us, and when that infernal gang are on our heels we couldn't be in a safer place, could we? And I've been thinking, Dick, that if Harry here would like to join our little party, we could be doing with his help. What about it?"

A moment's thought convinced Dick that this was a good idea, and when Harry Eyton said he was willing to go anywhere, Dick told him a little about the business they were on, and asked him if he were willing to risk his life.

"Anything to oblige," Harry remarked coolly, "and you can count on me. What I have to do, I understand, is to keep my eye on you; if we get into a tight corner I have to pull the dragon's tail while you get away and get on with the good work. Sounds easy, and I can begin right now. They can't hold you here against

your will if I remain to give evidence against Squashed-Tomato Face for bunging our pilot at Croydon. Then when that is done, I make for Singapore hell for leather and report to you at the International Bank."

"You will need some money," said Dick.

"You can give me some when I earn it. I have about two quid here, and that's enough to take me round the world. Easy when you know the ropes."

The big railway station was crowded the following evening as the night express filled up for her trip to the sunny south of France. Almost at the last minute Dick and Gus elbowed their way through the crowd to a sleeping-car, where two berths had been reserved for them. For two days they had lain low to keep their enemies guessing, and it was night when they made their way to the station. Both could have sworn that their movements had been undetected, and it was with a sigh of relief that they reached their compartment in safety.

"Hard lines we had to leave Harry Eyton behind," Dick said. "I don't suppose he will ever catch up with us again. Now, old man,

I'm going to turn in as soon as the train starts and sleep like a hog. I'm tired."

"If you sleep to-night you won't waken up again," replied Gus. "What has struck me is that though this train is crowded, this sleeping-car is almost empty. I'm going to prowls along the corridor. Stay here and keep your eyes open."

At that moment the guard's horn sounded, the engine whistled, and the long train began to glide out of the platform. When Gus returned along the corridor his face was clouded with anxiety, not for himself, but for his pal and the papers he carried in his belt.

"This car should hold twelve, and there's only four of us on it," he whispered. "Somebody has bought up the berths to keep the public out, and I had a squint at the two men along at the other end. One of them is Tomato Face. He had a muffler on, but I knew him in a minute. They're going to bed. Go and have a look yourself, old man."

Through a corner of the curtain drawn across the window of the sleeping-berth Dick peeped, and saw that Gus had been right. The man

with the bandage round his face was going to bed with his clothes on. The other man had already drawn the blankets over himself, and only his boots lay on the floor by his side. Neither of them spoke, and Dick glided back to Gus.

"They are forgetting to take their clothes off. There's something doing."

"Now let's have a word with the car attendant and see if he is one of the gang."

In a little room at the end of the car they found the attendant, and Gus tried his French on him.

"Oui, monsieur, it is a cold night," the man agreed. When asked about the empty berths, he shrugged his shoulders and poured out a stream of remarks, from which the chums gathered that the attendant was not worrying. Often people booked a berth and did not turn up for it. Why? They were mad, of course, and the English were madder than the rest. Imagine paying away hundreds of good francs and getting nothing for them.

"Good-night, monsieur," Gus said finally. "My friend and I are very tired. We are going to sleep soundly. Good-night."

The words were spoken loud so that the two men could hear all, and presently Dick and Gus walked back along the swaying corridor, entered their compartment, and shut the door with a bang. In ten minutes they had formed a plan of defence in case they were attacked.

A bundle of clothes was fixed in each of the two beds they should have occupied, and the blankets drawn up over them to represent two sleeping figures. Dick took a penny from his pocket and tossed.

"Heads," cried Gus.

"No, it's tails," said Dick; "I stay here to receive the party. You go next door."

Gus looked very disappointed that he had lost the toss and the honour of being at the post of danger.

"I think you'd better let me stay here, after all," he said.

"No fear," Dick answered. "Pop off, old boy, and don't fall asleep."

"You've got your penknife? Watch what you are doing, Dick. Can we not toss just another time?"

Dick took his chum by the shoulder and

pushed him out into the corridor. "I expect you'll have most of the fun, Gus—it's always your luck. See you in the morning."

Gus went into the empty compartment next door and lay down on a bed. Dick, after a last glance at the stuffed figures, switched off the light, and, crawling under the bunk, lay down on the floor.

Hour after hour passed while he lay there cramped and cold. Midnight, one o'clock, two, three, while the night express thundered across the plains of France. During the whole night the corridor was deserted, and no sound could be heard in it except the rattling and creaking of the woodwork and the rhythmical beating of the wheels on the jointed rails beneath. In Dick's ears the wheels seemed to say, "Loompop-o, Loompop-o," till a tired numbness began to creep over his brain and his eyelids drooped. His whole body craved for sleep. He was dying for sleep, and he was almost dropping off when suddenly he woke up with a start and became alert in a moment.

A door had opened along the corridor. Two pairs of feet tiptoed along the corridor. Dick

felt for his penknife, and lay waiting with his heart thumping.

Outside, the two men hurried along to the attendant's room. Rousing the attendant, one of them asked for wine.

"We have a headache, monsieur. If you have anything to drink, perhaps——"

"Mais certainement, I have wine. One moment."

"Bah!" said one when he tasted what was offered him. "This is poor stuff. These cursed railway companies think we have the estomacs of a cow."

"Henri," said the other, with sudden inspiration, "what fools we are. We are forgetting the excellent Muscat your wife put in the case for us. You have two flasks, n'est-ce pas?"

"So. I had forgotten. Get them and let this gentleman taste what like wine should be."

The attendant sipped a glass. "Very good," he said. And when the flask was held out to him he gulped down his first glass to make room for more. A great drowsiness immediately passed over his brain, he smiled feebly, his legs

collapsed gently as if he were a rag doll, and he sank to the floor.

“Quick, take his keys.” Then with long, stealthy strides they moved towards the compartment occupied by Dick. He heard the key being inserted gently in the lock, a cold breeze blew in as the door opened, and Dick’s hand tightened on his knife.

By the light of a signal cabin which flashed past, the two men saw the figures on the beds, the figures of the two boys they were going to grasp by the throats and hold till the life passed out of them. The mad pilot’s hand was on the coverlet feeling for a grip when suddenly he gave one of the loudest yells that was ever heard in the whole of France, for Dick had turned in his narrow hiding-place and was stabbing the man’s ankle with the blade of his pocket-knife. The wounds could not do very much damage, but they were painfully sore.

“Oi ! Oi ! Oi ! Ow !” the man yelled.

Before he could get away Dick wriggled out, and springing to his feet dealt him a smashing blow with his fist. There was no need to hesitate about hitting out in the darkness,

thanks to Gus's brilliant idea of only one of them remaining in the compartment, so Dick sailed into the fight with joy and lashed out with vigour whenever he came in contact with any part of a human being. And the plan worked even better than the chums had foreseen. Gus opened the door and suddenly switched on the light, and at once broke into a wild whoop of delight. The mad pilot, infuriated by the pain in his ankle as well as in his nose, which Dick had tapped afresh, had his colleague on the floor, and was raining blow after blow upon his face and head.

"That's the stuff to give 'em, hit hard," cried Gus, and with a snarl like a wild beast the man turned on him, trying to get a tiger's grip on his throat or claw his eyes out. Gus saved himself by taking a step back into the corridor, then, as his enemy lunged wildly towards him, Gus put every ounce of strength he possessed into his right arm and crashed home over the man's heart. He collapsed like a sack of potatoes on top of his prostrate colleague, and both lay still.

"Keep an eye on them," panted Gus. "I

want to see if the attendant has a finger in the pie." One glance at the snoring man in the cubicle satisfied him, and he darted back to his pal. "Heave them over and tie their hands behind their backs, Dick. That's the way. Now better have a look in their pockets to see if they have any fire-irons. They won't waken up for a minute or two."

They made a little pile on the bed of what was in the men's pockets: a roll of franc notes as small change and ten notes of a hundred francs each, a wicked-looking little revolver which a man could easily conceal in his hand, a couple of knives, a knuckle-duster with spikes on it half an inch long, a yank of silk cord, and a letter.

"This is what we want to see," said Gus. "It's a love-letter about you, Dick. Have a squint at it."

Dick took the typewritten note and read:

"Instructions from headquarters. The English boys have to be taken at all costs, dead or alive. Particular attention to be given to the one called Dick. He carries papers which are



Every ounce of strength he possessed.

required urgently. The prisoners have to be thrown off the train at Hauteville.”

The signature was a small representation of a dragon done in green with the figure two printed after it.

A jug of water thrown over the men brought them round, and they were propped up against

the corridor door. Dick was nursing an aching jaw he had got in the fight, and he left Gus to do the parleying.

"Ever been in jail?" Gus asked, when the mad pilot was able to understand. "For what you did at Croydon and on the train here you should get seven years at least."

The man's eyes gleamed with hate, but he said nothing.

"And the police will be interested in this," Gus continued, holding out the paper with the green dragon on it.

The man's eyes twitched, and with his tongue he moistened his lips to speak.

"Get it off your chest," Gus advised.

"I want that letter," the man said sullenly.

"Oh, that's got you. Well, look here, we'll give you this paper and set you two free if you tell us how you are mixed up in this affair; if you don't tell, then you stay where you are, and we hand you and the whole bag of tricks over to the police."

The man hesitated, but only a minute.

"I'm going to tell you," he said. "Loosen my hands."

“ You won’t get us that way, old son ; speak on.”

“ I don’t know very much. I was offered a thousand francs by a man in Paris. No, I don’t know him. That’s all.”

“ Two questions I am going to ask,” said Gus. “ First, where is Hauteville ? ”

“ We should be at it in a few minutes. The train slows up there, but doesn’t stop.”

“ Second, what does this figure 2 mean beside the green dragon ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Well, have it your own way, but remember you stay here till you tell.”

The man was desperate.

“ It means that this order was given by No. 2,” he cried. “ I don’t know who he is, but he is in charge over all Europe.”

“ Where is No. 1 ? ”

“ Singapore. I want that paper now. If it gets out of my hands——”

“ I suppose the Green Dragon will snap at you ? ”

“ It will kill me.”

“ That would save a lot of trouble for you

later on ; but there is your letter." Gus stuffed it into the man's pocket. " And there go these nasty little things we found on you and your mate." Gus pitched them out the window. " The money I am going to keep in the meantime. But what will we do with the two skunks themselves, Dick ? "

" Throw them out at Hauteville."

" By Jove ! I didn't think of that."

The two men were propped up on their feet in the corridor where they could catch a glimpse of the country. Grey dawn was just breaking.

" Tell us when we come to Hauteville or we take you right on," said Dick. " It doesn't matter tuppence to us."

But the mad pilot, with visions of five years' hard before him, was keen to get away.

" We are almost at the place," he said when the engine brakes went on and the train slowed down to ten miles per hour. Dick lowered the window and looked out, and a mile ahead over a long stretch of sand dunes saw a little group of men waiting.

" Are these your pals ? " he asked.

" Yes."

“ Good. We shall put you out when we come to them. Open the door, Gus, and get your knife ready to cut their hands and feet free. Good-bye, Tomato Face; give my love to auntie. Ready, Gus? Now.”

The place had been chosen by the gang because there was some very deep sand there to break a fall, and the train was evidently in the habit of going slowly for a distant signal. At Dick's word of command Gus slit the ropes of the pilot. The man grabbed the running-board, let himself down, and jumped for it.

“ The other one,” cried Dick.

The other man, who had not spoken a word, did not jump so confidently, but clung to the board and yelled, “ I shall break von leg.”

“ You'll break my heart if you stay here any longer,” bawled Dick. “ Off you go, and the best of luck.” He gently tapped the man in the chest with his boot, and with a cry of terror he let go and rolled head over heels to safety.

“ And that's that,” remarked Gus. “ I see some of the gang shaking their fists at us. Now I am going to have my beauty sleep.”

“ Same here. The attendant seems to be having pleasant dreams yet.”

“ And he’ll have a pleasant awakening.”

When the attendant finally awoke to the duties of a new day he sat up and rubbed his eyes. Several hundred francs lay on the floor by his side. The two gentlemen who gave him the drink had got off the train, and the two English garçons were sound asleep in their berths. So when no complaint of train robbery was made at Marseilles, the honest fellow with complete sang-froid put the money in his pocket and said no more about it.

A great P. & O. liner was lying out in the harbour when Dick and Gus found their way to the docks.

“ We are just in time to catch the boat,” said Dick. “ There she is, and Smith, the old scoundrel, is somewhere on board with the ivory idol. I’m going to get that or bust.”

In five minutes they were in a motor boat on their way out to the monster liner.

CHAPTER VII

SMITH IN HIS TRUE COLOURS

WITH a feeling of relief Dick and Gus climbed on board the steamer, and bade farewell to France. On the ocean they would be free, they imagined, from dastardly attacks by the agents of the Green Dragon, unless Smith and the Chink they had seen in London could be counted dangerous. But the chums had no fears about them. They were up to time in their journey to Loompopo, and their luck had held on land and in the air: they could face a sea voyage with confidence.

After reporting to the purser and taking over their cabin, they went on deck to have a look round.

The ship was carrying a full complement of passengers: planters on their way out east,

sunshine-seekers going to India and Egypt, coloured students returning home, a few card-sharpers hoping to have some pigeons to pluck, invalids in search of health. Dick and Gus ignored the crowd and kept their eyes skinned for Smith. But he was not on deck. Going down to the smoke-room, they asked a steward for a copy of the passenger list and scanned the names of all on board.

"There he is," pointed out Gus. "Mr. Charles Smith. No. 52. Let's go and pay him a visit."

Without troubling to knock at the door, Gus opened it and they peeped in. The man was reclining at ease in a chair facing the porthole with a French newspaper in his hand.

"Waiter, bring me a whisky and soda," he said, without looking round.

"I'll get it if you give me the ivory idol," Gus replied, and the fat man sprang from his chair as if somebody had stuck a pin in him.

"You—you pair of whelps," he snarled. "Where have you come from? I thought you were left in London."

“ And where we didn’t stay very long. Were you reading the paper to see if any more accidents had taken place ? Now please give me the ivory idol and I’ll apologize for giving you that bath at Tilbury.”

Smith’s face became livid with passion, his eyes glistened, his fists clenched.

“ You infernal pup, you—— I’ll kill you for that. I’ll tear your heart out, I’ll——”

“ And then will you give Dick the ivory idol ? ”

For answer he rose cursing and slammed the door in their faces.

“ Good-afternoon,” Gus cooed sweetly. “ So glad to have seen you again, and I hope you enjoy your whisky when it comes.”

Back in their own cabin the two friends debated on the best course to be taken, and decided to lie low for a day or two till they found out the ship’s routine. Then they might find a way to get the idol back from Smith ; but they were reckoning without their opponent. As they were speaking Smith himself appeared in the doorway with what was supposed to be a genial smile on his face.

“ Can I have a word with you two young gentlemen ? ” he asked.

“ Come in,” said Dick, trying to hide his surprise.

“ I want to congratulate you gentlemen on your jolly fine work,” Smith began. “ And I want to lay all my cards on the table. We can join company now and go to Loompopo together as Colonel Stannard desired. Do you not know that in order to make sure that some of us would get through safely, he sent us both to Loompopo ? Now the worst is over and we can join in and pool our resources. I congratulate you both on your pluck, and I want to shake hands with you.”

Dick Stannard, a fair fighter and true as steel, blinked at what he heard. He did not deal in lies himself, and Smith’s blandness was well affected. But Gus replied casually :

“ You’re an awful liar, Smith. You are out for yourself all the time. We know you are not a member of the Green Dragon, but you hope to be. With the ivory idol you are hoping to force your way into the gang, and in the meantime you want to get in with Dick too. I’ll

tell you what you are, you're a rotten traitor and a spy, and I would trust you no farther than my little finger."

Smith winced at the words "traitor" and "spy"; but with an effort he kept his temper.

"What does Mr. Dick say? He is in charge of the expedition, and I take his opinion."

Dick, who was still slow to believe a man could be such a liar, gave his answer slowly.

"You can join in with us, Smith, on one condition."

"On no condition," cried Gus.

"Yes, on one condition."

"And that is?" the man asked eagerly.

"If I am to be in charge, hand over the ivory idol."

"That's ridiculous. Better if I carry it. It will be—be safer with me."

"Then get out."

Smith rose and shook his fist in the lad's face.

"Then it's war," he bawled. "War to the end between you and me. In Loompopo I'll have you both ripped to bits and the pieces burned. I'll have your hearts torn out——"

"Good-bye, Mr. Smith, the door is open,"

said Gus. "Will you go out, or shall I have to boot you?"

With his open hand Smith smacked Gus on the face. "Take that, you whelp."

Gus's anger flamed up. Smith turned to go, and for a second presented an ideal target. Remembering his old position as centre-forward in the school team, Gus booted him, and Smith crashed out into the corridor.

"Get the idol," cried Gus. "He has it in his pocket."

Both lads darted to Smith, but Smith's body-guard, who had been waiting unseen at the door, sprang to the rescue, and the chums were confronted by a Chinaman with a long, keen knife in his hand.

"Keep back," the Chink cautioned. "Velly good knife. Savvy?"

Before they could attack, Smith had floundered to his feet and hobbled off like a wounded elephant, and the Chink disappeared like a yellow shadow.

In his cabin Smith tenderly rubbed the place where Gus's boot had caught him, muttering the while to himself:



" Velly good knife. Savvy ? "

" They called me ' traitor ' and ' spy . ' I wonder if these English pigs know. But, curse them, I'll have that map before we get to Singapore, and some night their bodies will

disappear overboard. Gott in Himmel, I'll murder them."

Without knowing it, Gus had given a true description of Smith, and had revealed him in his true colours. During the Great War Smith had been a German spy in France, had been caught and sentenced to death, and had been released on condition that he turned traitor and spied upon those who paid him. He had been a double-dealing rogue, a black-guard of the first water, and many brave men on both sides met their deaths because the unknown spy was in their midst. And yet Smith had brains. Cool and calculating he had been in his palmy days, a man without scruples and without remorse, perfidious and cruel, treacherous to friend and foe, one of the world's worst villains, a man chosen by the Green Dragon to do its dirty work, he was no mean opponent for two lads just left school.

As the big ship ploughed eastward through the Mediterranean, Smith night by night rubbed liniment on the sore part given him by Gus, and vowed vengeance on those who stood in his path towards Loompopo's millions.

CHAPTER VIII

MONKEY TRICKS

DURING the voyage through the Mediterranean the two chums had little time for fun, because wherever they went a Chinaman shadowed them, looking continually for the slightest opportunity of stealing Dick's papers. And they themselves had no chance of bagging the ivory idol from Schmidt, as his real name was. He was lying low in his cabin, playing for safety, and leaving the Chinaman to do his dirty work.

"Gus," said Dick the day they left Port Said, "I am about fed-up with that Chink. We do not see much of Karl now, but wherever we go that yellow image is just behind us."

"I am afraid we shall have to fix him," yawned Gus. "But I'm going to have a nap

now, old man ; you can puzzle out how to do it."

Gus stretched himself lazily in a deck chair, leaving his pal to tackle the problem. But Dick would rather do things than plan them, and after a few minutes, having nothing better to do, he strolled down to his cabin. As he expected, he found the Chink following him. Dick entered the cabin, shut the door, and a second afterwards opened it again suddenly. The Chinaman was skulking outside.

"What the dickens do you want?" demanded Dick.

"Soree, sir, is this number folty-nine?"

"It's not, and you jolly well know it. And next time I catch you near here or near me I'm going to boot you hard. Savvy?" But the yellow man did not stop to argue. Before Dick could say more he had glided along the passage and had disappeared. Gus grinned when Dick told him about it.

"And what are you going to do about it?" he asked. "You are the boss of this little show."

"I promised to kick him."

“ No use, boss, you can’t kick a shadow ; but leave him to me, and I’ll put the lid on him.”

Both Dick and Gus were prime favourites with the ship’s staff. Often they spent an hour in the engine-room chatting with the chief engineer, who was only too willing to show them the wonders of the ship. So when Gus tried to borrow a few odds and ends, he had them without very much trouble.

“ We want them only for a lark, Mr. Cairns.”

“ Take what you want, lad ; but watch and not hurt anybody.”

With some wires and implements hidden under his coat Gus hastened to the cabin, and Dick and he were very busy for the next hour.

“ Well, that’s the trap ready,” said Gus at last. “ Now let’s go up on deck and see if we can entice the bird into it. You know what to say.”

“ Right-o, I won’t forget.”

The great P. & O. had just entered the Suez, and was crawling along at a snail’s pace waiting for a tug. Most of the passengers lined the rails to gaze at the desert, ghostly and mysterious in the shimmering moonlight. Dick

and Gus sat down on two chairs where a strip of shadow offered secure hiding-place for any eavesdropper. Almost as soon as they sat down the shadow was tenanted. Only the slight scuffle of a canvas shoe reached their ears, but that was all they needed to know that John Chinaman was there listening.

"A wonderful view of the desert," murmured Gus.

"Ripping, and I'm glad I've time to enjoy it."

"It must have been a fearful strain going about with that map of Loompopo in your pocket. Now you can rest with an easy mind."

"Thanks to you, Gus. I would never have thought of wrapping it in a piece of waterproof and hiding it in the water-jug. Now Karl and the Chink may search everywhere and try to catch me on the hop, but they would never think of looking in a place like that." Dick paused a minute, then whispered, "He's swallowed the bait. Did you hear him sneaking off?"

"Easy does it. Give him a minute. Come on now."



The shadow was tenanted.

They darted along the deck, down the staircase, along the companion-way, and crouched low against the wall in a position from which they could see their cabin door.

"I wonder if it's going to work. Has he gone in yet, Dick?"

"Don't know. Great Scott, Gus, he's bringing Karl Schmidt with him. We'll have two birds with the one stone."

Karl and the Chink came creeping along stealthily, gave a quick look round to see if the coast was clear, and then slipped into the cabin.

A moment afterwards a blood-curdling yell rang out. Dick and Gus sprang to the door, and, throwing it open, became convulsed with laughter at the scene that met their eyes. Karl, with his hand in the water-jug, was hopping from one foot to the other, bawling at the pitch of his voice ; while the Chink, grabbing his hand to help him, suddenly found that he could not let go again. He, too, began to join in the Charlestoning and the yelling.

“ Oi ! Oi ! Oh ! ”

“ Ha-ha-ha ! ” roared the two chums from the doorway. “ Keep it up and we’ll beat time for you.”

“ What’s wrong, gentlemen ? ” a steward asked, thinking a murder was being committed.

“ It’s all right, steward, we’re only larking,” Gus explained, and the man, smiling at the new game of the two high-spirited lads, went off and left them to it.

“ Murder ! ” bawled Schmidt. “ Oi ! You are killing me ! ”

Dick touched an electric switch, shutting off the current running through the water in the jug, and the two dancers slid to the floor.

“ By Jove ! caught you this time,” cried Gus, wiping the tears from his eyes. “ Two of you, too. You looked absolutely priceless like that, Karl. An electric battery fixed to a small piece of brass in water can work wonders. Like some more ? ”

“ Swine ! ” gasped Schmidt.

Dick now turned to the Chinaman. “ Get up and take off your things.”

“ What’s the game ? ” asked Gus.

“ I’m going to give this fellow what I promised—a jolly good hiding. Drop his knife out the porthole. Now get up and put up your fists.”

“ The Chink knows how to fight,” said Karl.

“ So much the better. See fair play, Gus, and Schmidt can second his pal. Lock the door.”

Dick and the Chink were fairly evenly matched, though the yellow man could give almost a stone in weight. Both were the same height and had the same reach. The Chinaman stripped well. As he stood, naked to the waist, the electric light glistened on his oily skin and

revealed the rippling muscles of his chest and back, and his biceps showed up big and hard. Dick was of slighter build, but he had always been careful to keep himself fit as a fiddle. What he lacked in strength he hoped to make up in science.

“One minute rounds,” announced Gus. “Fight to a finish. On my right Dick Stannard, middleweight champion of Merryton ; on my left Mahogany Face, the yellow peril of Limehouse. Ready ? Seconds out. Time !”

From long custom Dick was going to shake hands, but the Chink sprang in like a flash, lashing out viciously with both bare fists. He caught Dick off his guard and began to pummel his face, till a heavy straight blow from the left smashed in on his ribs. That taught him caution. He stepped back, and both began to feel more carefully for an opening in the other's guard. The first round passed without much damage being done on either side.

“Time !” cried Gus, and again the Chink sprang in to knock his opponent to pieces at close quarters. But Dick was ready this time and kept him out. But the cabin was too

narrow for much footwork, and the Chink, breaking through by sheer brute force, drew first blood by a smart blow on the English lad's nose. Dick, giving a couple of short, stiff, piston-like punches, drove him back again. Probably the Chink had not expected such punishing body-punches, for they shook him up and made him glad to hear the interval called. A wet towel made Dick as fresh as paint for the third, and he had learned his lesson. His man preferred in-fighting. Dick decided to keep him out.

But easier said than done. Handicapped by the small size of the ring, Dick could not manœuvre for position as he would have done in normal circumstances. The Chinaman fought like a tiger, fiercely and thirsting for blood. Exerting all his strength, Dick crashed in blow after blow on the glistening yellow body, and in spite of the blood streaming down his own face, thrilled with triumph as he felt the yellow man becoming groggy. By the end of the fourth round both were panting for breath. Sweat was streaming from their bodies. The atmosphere was like an oven.

"Your best chance is a quick knock-out," Gus advised.

"I wish I could get it," Dick gasped. "He's as hard as iron."

"Time !"

Dick never forgot that fifth round. Almost before he was on his feet the Chinaman was at him again, punching his face till he could see nothing but stars. His head was swimming, and Dick knew that he was all out. If only he had had more room ! If only he had been able to get round the Chinaman's flank ! Then suddenly Dick gripped himself for a mighty final effort. Some words he had once heard ran through his mind, "A Britisher never knows when he is beat." By pure will-power he determined to win, because he had never been beat before. With one hand he dashed the sweat from his eyes. He saw his chance. Suddenly he stepped back. The Chinaman, overreaching himself in his eagerness, left a chance open. And Dick took it. Putting every ounce of strength he possessed into his blow, he swung up with his right and caught the man fair and square on the point of the chin. The

Asiatic's head clicked back, and he went down like a log.

“ One, two, three, four, five——”

Dick stood well back as the Chink gamely staggered to his feet and squared up again. Dick let him recover, and waited till he rushed in again. Crash ! A right, straight from the shoulder, caught the man over the heart and he went down finally like a felled bullock. When the full count had been taken Dick stepped across to his foe and lifted him up. Presently his eyes opened, and the usual bland smile returned to his face.

“ You are a game fighter, Chink,” said Dick. “ And I apologize for threatening to hoof you out. You are mixed up with a dirty lot, but you fought clean to-night.”

“ Velly good fight,” smiled the Chink. “ Dam good fun.”

“ We can shake hands to-night. Next time we meet we won't, if you are still in the same gang. You've fought like a sport.”

Shaking hands very cheerfully the Chinaman departed.

“ I'd like to do the same with you,” said Gus

to Karl, "only it would be too much like punching a jelly-bag. Hand over the ivory idol and then get out."

The wily German began to laugh.

"Too late, gentlemen; I have not got it. Search me, search my cabin, you will not find it."

"Have you destroyed it?" demanded Dick fiercely.

"No. I love it too much to destroy it, and I am going to use it in Loompopo. At Port Said I posted it to myself in Singapore. It is now in the ship's mail. You cannot rob the mail bags."

"Gee! what a trick," said Gus. "This fat old sinner has been cute; but we shall see you in Singapore, Karl. And many thanks for the dancing entertainment. By the way, don't forget the story of the monkey putting his hand into the jar of nuts. That's how they catch a monkey. He won't open his hand to let the nuts go, and he can't get his hand out of the jar as long as he keeps his hand shut. The electric shock you got will remind you."

Back in his cabin Karl soon forgot the agony

he had been through. In his cunning brain a scheme was forming by which he would cheat more than the two chums who were up against him. He would beat the Green Dragon itself, outwit the chief, and scoop the pool.

He saw himself a millionaire, dipping his hands into a great heap of glittering jewels, all his own, to share with nobody. Once he got to Loompopo he would use the ivory idol as a talisman to impress the niggers. He would come out top dog. He would be the richest man in the world.

With these comforting thoughts he went to sleep. Already he had forgotten the story of the monkey and the handful of nuts.

CHAPTER IX

THE CHANDU SHOP

KARL SCHMIDT was the first man to disembark at Singapore, and at once he rushed away to book a room in an hotel, where he gave orders that if a registered package should be sent to him by post, it had to be given to no one except himself. Then having complete faith that His Majesty's postal officials would keep the ivory idol safe against all comers, he turned to the Chinaman who had come with him from London, and said, "Now I am ready to go with you to the chief."

"No savvy chief."

"Now look here, my lad, quit that fooling. I know the Green Dragon is behind all this, and I'm blooming well going to see the chief himself. As soon as he knows that I have the ivory idol he will be ready to talk business."

And if you don't take me, so much the worse for you."

"Come with me," said the Chinaman.

Without another word he turned away from the hotel to lead Schmidt to No. 1, the chief of the Green Dragon, the most powerful secret society in the world.

Passing along the main street of Singapore, the Chinaman led the way to a very respectable-looking chandu or opium shop. Most of these places are quite decent, being licensed by the Government, and being under constant police supervision. But some chandu shops are not as innocent as they appear.

When Karl Schmidt entered the front shop a few Orientals were sitting around gossiping. None of them appeared to have the slightest interest in him. The guide spoke a few words to a yellow-faced attendant. He darted a keen glance at Schmidt and disappeared into the interior of the shop. After an absence of a few minutes he returned and spoke to the guide again.

"Follow me," said the guide, and Schmidt followed.

He was led down a long corridor with several doors opening off it. The place was almost dark after the glare of the streets, and one or two coloured lamps did little more than show up the obscurity. They halted finally before a pair of rich dark curtains screening the corridor, and the guide struck two notes on a copper gong.

"Come in," a voice shouted.

Karl Schmidt at last was in the presence of the chief. Schmidt was rather surprised to see an old Chinaman dressed in European clothes—the suit had been made in London—sitting at a roll-top desk writing. This gentleman continued to write without looking at his visitor. When at last he did look up, he spoke in Chinese to the Chink who had arrived from London. The guide began a lengthy explanation, and when he had finished and had been dismissed with a gesture, the chief spoke.

"Why have you come here, Herr Schmidt?" he asked. "My servant says you insisted upon seeing me."

The sudden question and the almost perfect Oxford accent bowled Schmidt over with surprise.



"Why have you come here?"

"Eh, I had some business to discuss with you."

A pair of narrow eyes were searching his face.

"Let's hear it."

"My name is Karl Schmidt."

"I know it. Mine is Sing Lee."

"Thank you. I came here because I thought I might be of service to you. When I was asked to do that job in London, I guessed that the Green Dragon was at work. I have much information. I know all about Loompopo and Queen Selulla, and I know the two boys you are after. One of them, Dick Stannard, has a map of Loompopo and another paper with him. I know all about the scheme, and I have come to—eh—to join in with you."

A ghost of a smile flitted across the chief's face.

"I am afraid I do not know what you are talking about," was his comment. "This is an opium shop. I thought you had come to buy chandu."

Schmidt hesitated before answering. Though the Chinese gang did not need his help, he would need theirs to set his little scheme going, and he was aware that he must force himself into the inner circle of the Green Dragon.

" I know all about the hidden treasure," he said at last.

The Chinaman merely sat drumming the table with his long, lean yellow fingers. Karl lost his temper slightly.

" You can't fool me, Sing Lee. I have not worked in the German secret service without knowing something, and I am making a fair offer to join in and help you to get the treasure in Loompopo. It is hidden, as you know, at a place marked on a map carried by Dick Stannard. A fortune in precious stones is waiting to be picked up. But there must be no underhand work. You and I are educated gentlemen, and should be able to work together. Now do you admit knowing about the stones ? "

" What are your proposals ? "

" Our best plan would be to get Dick Stannard and his companion into your chandu shop here. You could manage that. Very well. In this place, where we have privacy, you can get the map and another paper which is a sort of diploma showing the bearer to be a Knight of the Fire Mountain. With that paper we win the natives' confidence, with the map we

find the locality of the treasure, and we share out on an equal basis."

"And the two boys——?"

"You can settle with them here. I expect you know how to seal their lips."

Again the chief drummed with his fingers and appeared lost in thought.

"Have you told me all you know, Herr Schmidt?"

"Yes."

"You know a great deal, Herr Schmidt. You know too much for me to let you go." A look of apprehension stole across Schmidt's face at the calmly spoken words; but the chief's next words reassured him. "I must let you in with us. By the way, what about the ivory idol?"

"Ah, I'd forgotten," lied Schmidt. "I have it safely."

"Both map and idol will be in my keeping, I presume?"

"No. Equal partnership. I keep the ivory idol. The map will be yours. Now, Sing Lee, are you on?"

Much to Karl's surprise, the Chinaman

agreed at once smilingly—so quickly that Karl's suspicions were aroused.

"Sing Lee," he said solemnly, "do you swear by the bones of your ancestors that the ivory idol will remain with me?"

"I cannot take it. I cannot rob the king's mail to get it, and even if I could I would not. I swear. It will always be in your possession. To-night at five o'clock come here again, and I hope to have the two youngsters by that time in this chandu shop."

"I know I can trust you, Sing Lee. You will find me useful; before I come to-night I shall leave the ivory idol in safe keeping; you will find me useful with the boys. There will be no witnesses here?"

"My men tell no tales."

"Still, for safety's sake."

"As you like."

"Now let's have something to drink. I am as dry as a fish."

After partaking of his accomplice's hospitality, Karl Schmidt returned to his hotel well satisfied with himself and with the world in general. All his plans were going better than

he had imagined they would go. The Chink chief had proved himself no match against German diplomacy.

"Of course," Karl thought to himself, "Sing Lee knew at once he could not get the ivory idol from me. He knew my mettle as soon as I spoke to him. Another man in my place would have carried the idol with him into that chandu shop and had his throat cut. And to-night, when Sing Lee has settled with those two brats, I shall settle with him. Both the idol and the map will be mine. I share with no man."

Chuckling horribly to himself, he retired to his bedroom to prepare a sandbag to put old Sing Lee to sleep. And when the mail came in he secured his registered package and opened it with fingers trembling with excitement. His little ivory idol lay secure in the box in which it had come from Port Said.

"You are mine," he gloated. "You are mine, and will open up the way for me among the niggers in Loompopo. My precious little idol, nothing will ever separate us; I shall die before I part with you."

Meanwhile the Green Dragon was at work

to get Dick Stannard and Gus Trepington into its eager clutches. . . . Their fate would be decided that same night at five o'clock. The chief of the Green Dragon had said it, and whatever he said was as good as done.

CHAPTER X

IN THE CLUTCH OF THE GREEN DRAGON

DICK and Gus had both observed the haste with which Karl Schmidt had left the ship as soon as she arrived in the crowded waterway of Singapore.

“Gus, old man, the real business begins now,” said Dick to his chum.

“We’re ready. There goes old Schmidt and his yellow shadow. What’s your first step when we get ashore?”

“To the bank for cash, and then to hunt up a ship for Loompopo. Dad may have cabled fresh instructions for us at the International Bank, and we may receive some word from Harry Eyton. I’ll always regret having had to leave One-Eye behind.”

Gus frowned in deep thought for a minute.

"Singapore is a lovely spot, Dick; but I've heard it's a proper cut-throat place to be adrift in. We'd better be careful now." Then, as he saw Dick glancing quickly at him, he added, "No, I'm not funking it. What I mean is, it is dangerous to go about with too much money in our pockets. You remember our experience in London. The chart may be stolen."

"But it's in my belt next my skin."

"They'd do more than pick your pocket out here. They'd skin you alive to get the map and the diploma."

"Well? I see you are having a brain-wave."

"It may be a good idea to put the papers in the bank till we are actually ready to sail. Why not fake a chart and let Karl and his merry men steal it, if they are keen on stealing?"

"You are a perfect stunner for ideas. Come on, we have just time to prepare the fake."

While the other passengers bustled and hurried to get ashore, Dick and Gus locked themselves in their cabin for the last time and spread out the map on the table. When they had finished their little work of art they had

made a very good fake of the original map. They marked Jewel Cave conspicuously, only in the wrong place. As a guide to its location they marked it 227 degrees from Fire Mountain and at a distance of eight miles, a little alteration which would make their enemies go in exactly the opposite direction from the true direction. They also copied out roughly the diploma of knighthood, and after putting the false copies carefully into his belt, Dick put the genuine articles into his coat pocket.

“That will put them off on a false scent,” said Gus cheerfully. “Just as good as blowing their brains out, and it avoids messiness. Now for the shore, where you can lock up the right papers in the bank till we are ready to sail for Loompopo.”

On the quay they had a choice of several kinds of vehicles. They disdained a taxi, and each chose a ghari, a glorified soap-box drawn by a small but very fast Delhi pony.

“Two to one on my turnout,” cried Dick. “I’ll race you to the International Bank.”

Each of the gharis dashed off at a tremendous pace through the traffic, clattering over the

stones like a squadron of cavalry, with the coolie drivers standing up and yelling like madmen. Up the central streets of the city they dashed, passing electric trams by a hair's breadth, till they rattled into quieter side streets to dodge the congested centre of the city. There they raced neck for neck, but Dick's driver secured the lead and kept it when they went into the traffic again.

"The International Bank," Dick's driver called as he reined in his pony smartly and pointed to the name written in huge letters over an imposing doorway. "Me win the race, tuan. Three dollars."

"My friend will pay it," laughed Dick. "Come on, Gus, you must stump up. I beat you by three lengths."

While they joked and settled with the drivers, neither of them paid any attention to a taxi which had halted across the street. The Green Dragon had arranged for that taxi to take the boys, and if they had entered it they never would have seen the International Bank. This was one of the very few mistakes that the Green Dragon ever made in its long history. It had

been sure the boys would take a taxi from the ship, but it had forgotten the British love of sport. Dick and Gus simply had not been able to resist a bit of fun with two high-spirited ponies, and that sporting instinct undoubtedly saved their lives.

But when they entered the bank, the coloured man in the taxi settled down to wait for them coming out. He had received orders to take those two lads to the chief not later than five o'clock, and the Green Dragon did not like being kept waiting.

As soon as Dick and Gus asked to see the bank manager they were shown into his private room.

"My name is Stannard," Dick began, "and this is——"

"Have a seat," the manager remarked. "I have been expecting you from the steamer to-day. I have received instructions from the London office to give every facility to Mr. Richard Stannard, son of Colonel Stannard. Nothing was said about your having a companion."

"He joined me at the last minute. This is

my chum, sir, Gus Trepington. He is going with me to Loompopo."

"Where?" cried the astonished gentleman.

"Loompopo."

"Good heavens, you speak as calmly as if you were going to the Isle of Wight for a holiday. I have orders to advance you money, but you will excuse me if I venture to give you some advice first."

"Certainly."

"You must either go home or wait till I can get into communication with Colonel Stannard. You must not go to Loompopo. The place is a death-trap. No one knows exactly what is going on there, but no ships are sailing. It's a perfect nest of Chinese pirates and cut-throats."

"I expect that is why my father sent me, sir," Dick said quietly.

"Things have changed since he was out here. The island used to be fairly quiet, and we traded with it; now it is a base for Chinese revolutionaries."

"We can only die once," remarked Gus cheerfully.

“ I won’t let you boys go. I must cable for fresh instructions.”

“ Better not, sir ; father wants this kept as quiet as possible.”

“ It’s an awful mistake. But, after all, your father knows what he is doing probably. It is not my duty to interfere.”

Dick was thankful he had not mentioned his father’s illness, or the bank manager never would have let him go.

“ You will let us have what money we require, sir ? ”

“ Yes, these are my instructions. I wish I could help you more.”

“ We shall call to-morrow for the money. Meanwhile it will be a favour if you keep this packet of papers in the safe till we are sailing.”

Dick watched his map being locked up, and the manager gave him a receipt for it.

“ By the way,” he said, “ no message has come for us from a man called Harry Eyton, I suppose ? ”

“ No ; is he another friend of yours ? ”

“ He is. We left him behind in France. I

don't suppose he will catch up on us. Now, sir, we shan't take up more of your time. We shall look in to-morrow for any money we may require."

When the bank manager saw he could not dissuade them from their projected trip, he shook hands warmly and wished them the best of luck.

Inquiry at a shipping office soon showed them that it was impossible to sail by any steamer to Loompopo. The man at the desk where they inquired smiled with a knowing smile when he heard their request.

"You young middies are always out for a lark," he remarked. "Why don't you ask me for a ship to take you to Hades?"

"We are not middies. We really want a ship."

"Really and truly?"

"Yes."

"Then skip over to the toy bazaar and buy one for a dollar."

"But——"

"Now push off. I'm busy this morning, and I have no time for skylarking."

Standing in the glaring sunshine outside, they looked at each other questioningly.

"This is a tougher job than we thought, Gus. How the deuce we are going to get to Loompopo I don't know, except we swim there."

At that moment a Eurasian gentleman, faultlessly tailored, stepped from a taxi and approached them with extreme politeness.

"Good-day, gennlemen. Wanta ship? I hear you wanta ship. Come this way, gennlemen. Motah-boat, fifta ton, dam fine boat. You step along with me."

"Where to?"

"You see the motah. Not far, gennlemen."

"Might as well have a look at it, if it is not far away," said Dick.

They went on foot to the harbour, and saw the very boat they were looking for—a smart, cleanly-built motor-boat, spick and span with new paint, her brasswork gleaming in the sun.

"If she's as good as she looks, she'll do," said Gus. "Can we have a trial run on her?"

"Step along, gennlemen. Have dam fine sail."



" Good-day, gennlemen. Wanta ship ? "

They stepped on board, and the Eurasian started up the engine. The propeller churned up the water into a mass of white foam, the clutch slipped in, and the boat glided off. Dick and Gus, both keen motorists, were delighted to find that an internal combustion engine in a boat is not different from one in a car. In-

deed, the boat was more easily handled than a car, because a boat requires no gear changing. The Eurasian very willingly allowed them to take control, and Gus shouted with joy and exhilaration.

“ This beats even old Bessie, Dick ; this is the very thing we want.”

After a glorious cruise around the buoy three miles out, Dick, too, had fallen in love with the little beauty, and was determined to have her at all costs. Two of them could sail the boat alone. They might even be able to bribe the Eurasian to go with them. But how Dick wished that Harry Eyton had been with them ! With his knowledge of engines, he would have been invaluable.

“ What price do you want, mate ? ”

“ Not bigga price. Two-tree thousand dol-lahs, p'rhaps. You step along and see the boss. Dam fine boss. Sing Lee. Him belong one chandu shop.”

“ What on earth is a chandu shop ? ”

“ Him sell opium. Vellah good shop. Plenty money.”

Dick hesitated at the word opium. He had

read a lot about opium dens when he was at school, and he seemed to remember them as rather unsavoury places where Chinese blood-suckers lay in wait for the unwary. But when he mentioned his doubts to Gus, his friend observed, "We can go and see what like the place is from the outside at least. If it is in one of the main streets it should be all right. I saw several tourists—Americans and other guys—going about looking at chandu shops this morning."

"I think we can risk it."

When they tied up at the pier steps, they told the Eurasian they would like to have a talk with Sing Lee about hiring or buying his motor-boat for a month's deep-sea fishing.

"Step along, gennlemen."

"Keep to the main streets. You see, we want to know our way back again."

Passing through the crowded streets of the great eastern city, where men of all nations and colours mingle together, they were conducted to a broad, quieter street, which evidently was a shopping centre. Sports outfitters, gunsmiths, tailors, hairdressers, tobacconists, all kinds of

shops were there, and all so big and imposing that Sing Lee's chandu shop seemed very insignificant.

"This is the place," said the guide.

"Lead the way in," said Gus. "And no trickery or we shall use our guns. Let's keep together, Dick."

The front of the shop was perfectly innocent. There was the usual knot of Chinese smokers smoking quietly and interested in nothing beyond their pipes of chandu. There were even a few tourists who had dropped in to get the thrill of being in an opium den. But there was nothing for them to see. All was as peaceful and quiet as one could wish for.

"There's not much danger here," said Dick, "unless we want a smoke. Isn't it beastly stuff? But it seems to be a very profitable business when Sing Lee can own a posh motor-boat. I only hope we can make a deal."

When they were entering the shop, a messenger who had been on the look-out darted down the long corridor to Sing Lee's private room to tell him of their arrival. Karl Schmidt, who had been waiting with him, stepped across

the room and hid his fat figure behind the thick curtains screening the wall.

It was exactly five o'clock.

"You see how punctual we are," remarked Sing Lee to the man behind the curtain. "It's good to be punctual. All right, boy," he said to his servant in Chinese, "show in my distinguished visitors. I have been waiting for them. And when they have come in, see that I am not disturbed. Do not come here until I send for you. Go."

A minute later Dick Stannard and Gus Trepington, with their right hands in their pockets gripping a heavy Webley revolver, were walking warily down the long corridor towards Sing Lee's room.

In another minute they would be in the clutch of the Green Dragon, which never lets go once its talons are fastened on its prey.

CHAPTER XI

DOWN AMONG THE DEAD MEN

“THIS is a very great honour to my humble shop, gentlemen,” Sing Lee began, shaking his own hands in the Chinese fashion to show his pleasure. “Please sit down. Have you come to see a chandu shop ? ”

“ We came to see if you are willing to sell us your motor-boat,” said Dick directly.

“ Ah, to talk business. Unfortunately the boat is not for sale. Will you have some refreshment, gentlemen ? ”

“ No, thank you. We have not very much time. If you were selling, how much would your boat be worth, Mr. Sing Lee ? ”

The man’s eyes narrowed to a mere slit as he smiled at their hurry to close a bargain. Coming closer to them, he said in a low tone,

"It is a very good boat. It is not for sale; but I shall be happy to give it you for nothing."

"How do you mean?" rapped out Dick, becoming instantly suspicious.

"Keep calm. There is no hurry, and you must take time to think over my offer. These walls are thick and we cannot be heard. I offer you that boat and your liberty in return for the map which one of you has in his pocket."

At once Dick and Gus sprang to their feet and whipped out their revolvers. Though Sing Lee found himself staring down two polished barrels his features betrayed no emotion beyond a faint amusement.

"Do not move or we fire," Dick warned him.

"Do not move yourselves or you are as good as dead. I have warned you. I want that map, and I make you an offer for it."

"Move back slowly towards the door, Gus," Dick ordered. "If this man moves an inch, fire."

Next moment Gus uttered an exclamation of alarm.

"Look out, Dick!"

But he was one-tenth of a second too late.

The floor gave way beneath them, and both toppled backward into the chasm that yawned to receive them. Dick alone had a clear field of fire, and as he fell he pulled the trigger ; but the bullet merely grazed Sing Lee's head. Down they fell into utter darkness, and when Sing Lee heard a faint splash of water far beneath, a seraphic smile spread over his face.

Quite calmly he drew up the trapdoor and spoke to the man behind the curtain, " You can appear now, Herr Schmidt ; they will trouble you no more."

" Gus, Gus, where are you ? " moaned Dick, who had had the breath knocked out of him with the fall. There was no reply. In the impenetrable darkness he could see nothing. A horrible stench rose to his nostrils and nauseated him. He lifted up his hand to wipe his eyes, but the smell of his own hand was sickeningly disgusting. " Gus, I say, old man, where are you ? Gus ! " Groping through the filthy slime, he found his chum at last, huddled up where he had fallen. With his face in the mud, he was like to be suffocated till Dick

heaved him up to a sitting position. "Gus ! Gus ! Speak to me for the love of Mike."

Gus came gradually to himself.

"Ugh !" he spluttered. "Where are we ? What a beastly, filthy, rotten stink ! Show a light."

Dick's matches were completely sodden and quite useless. He scraped several on the box without knowing which was the right end of the match, and his heart sank when he could not get even a spark. Then with joy he remembered a new electric torch he had bought. Switching it on, he cast a beam of light on Gus. The poor fellow was scarcely recognizable, covered as he was with mud, while blood oozed from an ugly wound above his right eye, received when he had fallen against a stone. Lord Trepington's only son and heir, the immaculate Gus, who had always loved his daily bath and decent clothes, was the most repellent spectacle that Dick had ever seen. The effluvium rising from him was perfectly staggering.

"Much hurt ? " asked Dick anxiously.

"Not much," and Gus actually smiled wryly as he added, "but this is not exactly a bed of

roses. A bit niffy, isn't it? See where we are if you can."

They found themselves in a circular tunnel about five feet in height. Slime and fungus covered the walls. On either side of them the tunnel seemed to extend indefinitely. A foot of black water flowed across the floor.

"This seems a queer kind of hole. Show the light up." Above them the roof had been pierced and a shaft formed, at the top of which they could just perceive the trapdoor through which they had fallen.

"I'm going down the tunnel to see if there is a way out, Gus. Stay here and shout when my light is going out of sight. We do not wish to lose each other."

Dick splashed downstream, casting the beam of light forward to look out for obstacles or pitfalls. Ten yards he went, counting each step, twenty, thirty, forty, and still no end to the tunnel. When he heard Gus shouting he picked his way back again.

"This is the biggest dungeon I've ever seen."

"It's not a dungeon, Dick. I think we have been dumped into one of the city's sewers."

“ Good Lor’, yes, that’s it. Golly, what a stink there is too ! But if we follow the water we should find a way out to the sea.”

“ Under water probably. Better stay here till the bounder up there comes to look for us. He is sure to come to get the map. Good job we faked one specially. My revolver’s lost, and I want to pot Sing Lee’s ugly old dial as soon as he peeps over.”

“ Mine has dropped too. Look, Gus, what is that ? Over there.”

To save his battery Dick had switched out his light, but as he turned it on again to look for his revolver, two pin-points of light were suddenly reflected. Then other two points of greenish light, then another two, till there were dozens. Dick stepped forward to investigate, then drew back in horror.

“ They’re rats. Hundreds of them.” The lamp slipped from his fingers, and before he found it Gus yelled out :

“ Quick with the light. Shoo, you brute ! The beastly thing ran over my leg.”

Dick fortunately found his torch, and turned it on in time to see a rat as big as a kitten

scuttling off. It did not disappear. It retired a distance—to wait.

“It was at my leg. See if I can find a brick.” Gus groped along the floor, closed his fingers on something solid, and grabbed it. To their horror they saw he was holding a bone. They did not know very much about osteology, but they knew enough to see that it was a shin bone, the bone of a man’s leg. Gus dropped it as if it were a live coal.

“Keep the light in, Dick.”

For some time neither of them spoke, till Gus murmured, “Our only hope is if they come for the map and we can bargain with them. How long will the battery last?”

“Goodness knows. These things vary so much.”

“Never say die. Sing Lee wants the map badly, and he won’t let the rats eat it.”

All round them they could see the dark forms of their enemies waiting. What nefarious deeds the chandu shop above had witnessed will never be known. The voracious rats leave very little when they are finished.

Presently they heard the trapdoor being

lowered, and a great face like the end of a ham peered over the edge. The well-known voice of Schmidt asked, "Feeling lonely, boys? I think we have you properly fixed this time."

Neither of them deigned a reply.

"Sulking, are you? If you are not in a hurry, you can have another hour or two. Are you going to give up the map now?"

"Yes, if you come for it," said Dick.

"No blooming fear. I wouldn't come down there for all the sparklers in Loompopo. Listen. Sing Lee and I have formed a partnership. He gets the map and I keep the ivory idol, and we are going to Loompopo together. I am letting down a string to you. Tie the map and the other paper to it."

"Not unless you promise to let us out."

"Keep them down," they heard Sing Lee's voice; "there is no hurry."

But Karl Schmidt was in a hurry to be off for his treasure.

"You young swine," he cried, "do you know there is no way out? The end of the sewer is never above water. Are you going to give up the things?"

"If you promise to let us out. If not, the rats get the map."

Schmidt suffered an agony of apprehension at the thought of losing it.

"I do promise. The map, and you are free."

"On your word of honour?"

"Yes, blast you both. On my honour."

A string was let down, and as soon as Dick saw how thin it was he gave up the plan he had formed of making an attempt to swarm up it. He tied the faked papers to it, and it was pulled up. They saw Schmidt grab it feverishly at the top and unfold the papers for examination.

"These are the right papers, Sing Lee. Have a look."

Both boys saw Sing Lee bend down to have a close look, and behind him the German swinging his arm for a blow; but before they could utter a word of warning, Schmidt had brought down his sandbag with a sickening thud at the base of the Chinaman's skull, just as he once had felled Colonel Stannard. Sing Lee dropped like a log. Schmidt seized the papers, caught hold of Sing Lee by the ankles, and hurled him down into the sewer. The man's



Almost crashed on top of Dick's head.

body almost crashed on top of Dick's head. The trapdoor banged shut. They were left in silence.

"What a rotten brute he is," cried Gus. "He not only goes back on his word of honour to us, he has done in his own pal. Pick up Sing Lee, old man ; this gives us a glimmer of hope. The Chinks will come soon to look for him."

As Dick was heaving up the body of his enemy his hand slipped, and the electric torch dropped in the mud. Immediately the tunnel was plunged into darkness. They both groped blindly to find the light ; but it was gone. The scampering of rats' feet could be heard much closer to them.

That unequal fight of two boys against a swarming mass of rodents would not have lasted long ; but just as all hope was being given up, the trapdoor was lowered again, and an English voice asked :

"Anybody down there ?"

"Yes, get a rope."

"Strike me pink, it's Dick and Gus sure enough."

“ One - Eye ! One - Eye ! Thank heaven you’ve come. A rope, quick. Get us out.”

“ Half a mo’.”

“ Have you any matches ? ”

“ Catch.”

Dick caught them as they fell, and struck a light. He fired the whole box and threw them in among the crowd of rats. With squeals of terror they fled.

“ Half a mo’,” Harry Eyton said again, and never had a human voice sounded sweeter in their ears. “ See now if I can get a rope.”

CHAPTER XII

ONE-EYE TURNS UP TRUMP

“ I’LL have you out of there in a jiffy,” Harry Eyton assured them. “ Make no noise while I get a rope.”

He wrenched down Sing Lee’s beautiful curtains, tore them into strips, and tied the strips together firmly with reef knots strong enough to bear a man’s weight. One end he lashed round his body, wedged his legs against the mouth of the pit, and dangled the other end down into the darkness.

“ Climb up if you can, boys ; you’ll be too heavy for me to pull.”

Gus, weak through the wound above his eye, climbed up first, using the stirrup grip he had learned in the gymnasium at Merryton. This is the easiest way to climb a rope. Dick

climbed up hand over hand—the quickest way, but one demanding strength.

“ One-Eye, how on earth—— ? ”

“ Shut up till we get clear of this place.”

Harry suddenly covered his nose with his hands : “ Oh ! you’re both smelling like Gorgonzolas. Gas helmets on ! Oh, Gus, you ain’t lavender. But come on and get out of it.”

“ How are we going ? ”

“ Right out through the shop. If the Chinks try to stop us, fight for your lives. Are you ready ? ”

“ One moment,” said Dick. “ I’ll have to go down again and hoist up Sing Lee.”

“ Where is he ? ”

“ Down there.”

“ We haven’t time,” said Harry ; “ leave him. His gang will soon get him out. We’ll be lucky if we escape there ourselves.”

But Dick had already gone back for his enemy, and was tying the rope under the unconscious man’s armpits.

“ Haul away.”

Gus and Harry together managed to pull the dead weight up till Sing Lee’s head was level

with the floor. Harry then caught him by the scruff of the neck and dragged him out. In another minute Dick was up beside them.

“Is he dead, Harry?”

“No such luck. He’ll come round presently as soon as he gets a whiff of fresh air. We’ll have to get out pretty smart.”

Dick at once assumed command.

“This place is a death-trap,” he said. “It’s easy to get in, but it’s going to be hard to get out. One of us must get out at all costs. There has to be no stopping to pick up anybody that falls. Every man for himself. The one who gets out will bring police to raid the chandu shop, then streak off by himself for Loompopo. Go first, Harry. Gus will go second, and I shall bring up the rear.”

“I’d rather bring up the rear,” said Harry; “that’s where the fun will be in this get-away game, and I’m fresher than you two.”

“Don’t stand jawing,” Dick whispered sternly. “Lead on.”

So scrupulously had Sing Lee’s desire for privacy been observed by his gang, that none of them had ventured down the corridor to his



A coolie barred the way.

den during the boys' imprisonment. An order is an order, especially when the Green Dragon is concerned. And the three might have been able to walk boldly right out through the shop if it had not been for the mud plastered all over Dick and Gus. The Chinks immediately became suspicious that all was not well. One big fellow, a coolie of the labouring class, as strong as a horse, barred the way. One-Eye did not wait for explanations. He drove his fist straight between the man's eyes, and sprang

to the door. Pandemonium broke out in the chandu shop.

"Smash them up," cried One-Eye. As a Chink made for him with a knife he saw red. With a yell of joy he leaped forward, and the Chink reeled back from a smashing blow which flattened his nose. Dick and Gus had good reasons for fighting as they had never fought before. They knew that if they failed to get through they would go a second time to the rat-pit. They fought like demons incarnate, hacking their way through with fists and feet. "Rumble them up," cried Harry, with the light of battle gleaming in his eyes. "This way. The door. I've got it open."

Gus would never have won through in his weakened condition, had his hand not fallen upon a convenient weapon, a two-pint bottle of wine standing on a table. He swung this like an Indian club and cracked two skulls. He cleared a ring round himself and fought inch by inch forward towards the door. Then he had to part with his weapon. A Chink was aiming at Harry with a revolver. Gus hurled the bottle with all his strength, crash, into the

man's face. A rain of wine and blood spattered the shop, but Gus was at the door. Harry grabbed him by the arm and swung him into the street.

Suddenly the lights in the shop went out. Where was Dick?

Then as a seething mob of infuriated Chinamen poured out of the shop, Harry caught a glimpse of his friend among them, being carried by the tide out into the street.

"Run for it," cried Dick, "I'm following."

It was the neatest and pluckiest bit of scapping that Harry Eyton had ever seen. Dick had remained in the shop to the very last, fighting to cover his friends' retreat, and when they had reached the door it was impossible for him to cut his way through. A wall of yellow men separated him from safety. Then the one way of escape flashed across Dick's brain. There was no one behind the counter at the far end of the shop, where the electric switch was. Dick ran there, plunged the room into darkness, and got down to it as if he were in a rugger scrum. The Chinks were taken by surprise. They ran towards the door, and Dick

found himself being carried in safety towards the very point he was trying to reach. A man's hand gripped his wrist in the darkness. Dick sank his teeth into the man's hand, and it let go.

"I'm coming," he yelled in the street. "Lead on, Harry."

For two minutes Dick fought a running fight till they had outstripped all their pursuers but one. That particular Chink was a runner who could have won fame at Olympia. He gained upon Dick, who, running for his life, was putting his all into the race. Dick could hear the man panting close behind him, could feel his fingers as they reached out once to grip his coat. Then suddenly Dick stopped and crouched down on all fours. The Chink had no time to stop himself from disaster. His feet caught on Dick's body, and the man went hurtling to the ground. When he fell he lay still, with his yellow features altered for life through coming in contact with the kerb.

The whole fight probably did not occupy more than two minutes, though it seemed an eternity to those engaged in it. In five minutes

they had dodged clear of all pursuit and were sheltering for a few minutes in a pitch-dark alley to regain their breath. Dick and Gus lay flat on the pavement of a great foreign city. Their hearts were thumping as they lay panting for breath. They were covered with mud, and blood, and sweat. They knew they were surrounded by foes on every side. But, strange to say, they had never felt happier in their lives. They came of the bulldog breed which never knows defeat, and their hearts were filled with the joy of battle.

"Gus," panted Dick, "how—how goes it?"

"Top-hole," panted Gus in reply. "I'm all right."

"That's the stuff to give them," grinned Harry through the darkness. "We'll have one minute's breather, then we shall have to be moving. You two infants are needing a bath mighty bad."

When they had cooled down a bit they stripped and took a header into the oily waters of Singapore harbour, and by the time they had got rid of most of the filth, One-Eye had bought a varied assortment of second-hand

garments for them. As they were giving themselves a good rubbing-down they heard the sound of a motor-boat chug-chugging out to sea.

“ I’ll bet my boots that’s old Karl off to Loompopo,” Gus remarked. “ He’s the rottenest brute of a man ever I saw. He swicked Colonel Stannard, he went back on his word of honour to us, and he clouted Sing Lee when his back was turned. He will never die in his bed, or I’m a Dutchman.”

“ Did he get the map ? ” asked Harry.

“ He has a faked one with him. I say, Harry, I’d give a fortune for a cup of coffee just at present.”

“ Keep your fortune, Rockfeller ; there’s a place near here where you can get a jolly good tightener for half a dollar, and you don’t need evening dress.”

Over a substantial meal in a second-rate restaurant, where their clothing excited no comment, Eyton related his adventures.

“ At Marseilles I was on the rocks, and didn’t know what to do to get some of the needful. I had to work my passage on a tramp to Port Said.

There I met a bloke who told me he was on one of the new airships cruising to India and Singapore. One of the crew had gone into dock with measles or something. I got his job and went with the gasbag. I was here two days ago, before your steamer arrived."

"Why did you not go to the International Bank and wait?"

"I was going to give you a pleasant surprise. But I missed you coming off the ship, then I saw you in a motor-boat next sailing out to sea. 'Dash it, I'm dished,' I thought. Ten minutes later I saw you both walking up the street with a nigger dressed to the nines. I rubbed my eyes and ran after you. You turned a corner, and when I came to it you had disappeared."

"That was when we went into Sing Lee's."

"How was I to know? I looked into every shop and hung about, and by good luck I was at the door of the chandu shop looking in when I saw a fat, suspicious-looking individual, like a whale in size, appearing from the back. 'Sing Lee does not wish to be disturbed,' he said to a Chink. When he came out he scooted away up the street like greased lightning."

"We were among the rats then with Sing Lee."

"I said to myself, 'If that old whale is here, Dick and Gus can't be very far away.' So I hitched up my pants, walked in boldly and said, 'Sing Lee does not wish to be disturbed.' They let me pass, and the rest you know. But how the dickens did you get into the trap?"

"My stupidity," groaned Gus. "We wanted to buy a boat, and we went with the flash gent right into Sing Lee's clutches."

"Strike me pink, I thought you had more savvy than trust a half-breed. But I can get a boat. They're as thick as flies if you know where to look for them. Get busy now and draw up a list of things you will require. How much money can you afford to spend, Dick?"

"Anything we need."

"Then go ahead with the list. You'll get a boat as easy as winking."

Dick called for a sheet of paper and a pencil, and began to jot down the things they would require to take with them. He divided their needs into four: transport, rations, ammunition, and kit. Harry, an experienced campaigner, rattled off their list of stores.

“Transport : Motor-boat, petrol, oil, spare parts. Rations : There’s a shop here which fits out expeditions with all food complete from bully-beef to soda water. Ammunition : Get three rifles, revolvers, some loose explosives. Kit : Oh, anything should do.”

“We may need some medical stores,” Gus suggested. “And one or two gadgets to give away in presents to the natives.”

“Good idea,” said Dick.

He commenced to write down beads, rockets, a gramophone, mouth organs, a field telephone, sweets and chocolate.

When they thought they had all complete, Harry led them cautiously through the darkened streets, and they lay low till daylight. Then Dick and Gus bought new clothes, bought a motor-launch, and superintended the laying-in of supplies. They kept out of sight as much as possible, and left Harry to do most of the work on shore. It was late afternoon when all was ready. The two then left Harry in charge while they slipped to the bank and got their map and diploma of knighthood.

“We’d better get off soon,” whispered Harry

as they went on board again. "Two boats over there have been loading up. All the crew are Chinamen, and I think they are keeping their eye upon us. As soon as it gets dark we go."

When darkness fell they untied and slipped away out on the tide. A low whistle sounded from the pier when they had cast loose, and the two other boats began to show signs of life.

"Open her all out," said Dick. "We have ten minutes' start at least."

Putting out all lights on board, they went full speed ahead out to sea. Three chums against Schmidt and the Green Dragon—Dick at the helm, Harry nursing the engine, and Gus keeping his first turn of watch.

CHAPTER XIII

LANDING AT LOOMPOPO

THEY had been sailing for two days on a course south-east from Singapore without catching a glimpse of land or of any other craft. The heat of the sun was sweltering. Not a breath of wind stirred, and the sea lay unruffled as a mirror. But the gallant little motor-boat was ploughing its way onward towards Loompopo.

Gus had erected an awning over the after-deck, where he was amusing himself by tossing over scraps of food to a hammer-headed shark which was following hopefully. Dick, with his eye on the compass, was holding the vessel on its course, and Harry was sweeping the horizon with his telescope. Suddenly his voice rang out :

“ Land ahead, Dick ; I can just see it through the glass.”

“ Ease her off to half-speed,” cried Dick. “ Let’s have a look, Harry.”

From that distance the island appeared as a low smudge of land with none of its physical features clear. Dick kept at half-speed, and after a couple of hours the island was quite visible.

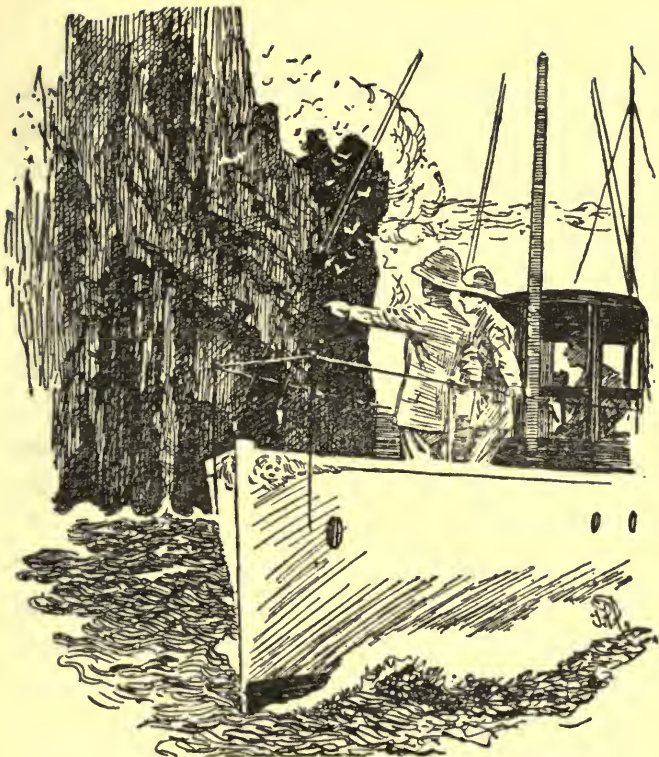
“ This looks like the place,” Dick commented. “ It seems to be a volcanic island, and that must be Fire Mountain in the centre. Can either of you see anything of Schmidt’s craft ? ”

They could see nothing except the vast expanse of blue sea. Not a sign of Schmidt or of any pursuing craft behind them.

“ Good,” said Dick. “ We shall have to lie off till dusk. We want to get in without being seen. What about some grub, Gus ? ”

“ I hope we can get some decent water soon,” said Gus. “ This stuff that we have is almost boiling with the heat. Not much trouble to make tea with it.”

The sun was setting when at last they stole nearer to the land. As they approached they



Huge, precipitous rocks rose sheer from the water's edge.

shut off their engine and allowed the tide to carry them in. Not a sound disturbed the silence except the lapping of the waves against the stern. The island seemed much bigger as they crept closer and closer to it. Huge, precipitous rocks rose sheer from the water's edge,

and they searched eagerly for a landing-place. At last Dick saw a little natural harbour and decided to land there. Darkness was settling down upon them when they unshipped their heavy oars and guided the ship in. There was no sign of any living creature on the island. It was dark, sinister, and silent. Instinctively Dick lowered his voice as he gave the final command :

“Keep to port, Harry. Steady. Now, when we touch, jump out and moor to that tree. Now, jump.”

Harry jumped with the agility of a cat and made fast to the tree. They were moored in two fathoms of water, which would keep them safe from sudden attack and allow them to make a quick get-away with full speed astern.

“I don’t suppose we can do much to-night,” commented Gus. “But first thing in the morning I’m going to get water.”

“Let’s turn in,” said Dick. “It’s Harry’s turn on watch. We shall do two hours each. Kick me up in two hours, old man.”

At first Dick could not get off to sleep. The responsibility of his command was weighing on

him. What if he had led his chums only to a horrible death in the eerie silence of that remote island? What if he failed his dad's trust in him? What if——? Presently he heard Gus snoring peacefully in his berth, and he smiled to himself—the snore sounded so homely.

At daybreak the island seemed more cheerful. They could see a little stretch of sand at the head of the bay, and a stream of crystal ran down among the rocks to find its way to the sea. They decided to advance cautiously along the rocks and get fresh water. There was still no sign of a human being. Harry jumped ashore with two empty petrol tins. Dick accompanied him carrying their two rifles. Gus, to his own disgust, was told to stay behind and get the paraffin stove going for breakfast.

“A jolly fine place for a bath,” Harry remarked, nodding towards a miniature waterfall. “Wish I had brought some soap with me. But the place is awfully quiet, Dick. Keep your eyes skinned.”

“I don't mind it being quiet.”

“I am not so sure about it. Usually when there's a dead silence like this——”

Crack !

A shot suddenly disturbed the echoes. Harry's hat was knocked in the air, and he flopped to the ground with a great rattling of petrol tins. "Get down, Dick," he cried.

"Are you hit ?"

"No. But that one was as near as I want it to be. Now, I wonder where it came from."

They were both lying flat behind a boulder, and Harry held up one of his tins. At once a hole was drilled right through it by a rifle bullet.

"Somebody seems to have lost his temper this morning," said Harry coolly. "I hate this sort of thing before breakfast. But I know his direction at least. Give me my rifle, Dick. You stay here and stick up your hat to attract attention. I'm going upstream a bit. Cheerio !"

"Don't risk——"

"There's no risk for me. That chump will think he has nabbed me. It's you he will be waiting for now."

Stealthily, like a snake, he wriggled towards the brook and rolled over into the bed of the

stream. The icy-cold water made him gasp for breath, but the bank afforded him splendid cover. As soon as he heard another shot at Dick's cap he began to crawl upstream to take the unknown enemy in the flank.

Dick behind the rock was not happy. He knew that Harry had gone on a very dangerous job, and he was wishing he had gone on it himself. Looking back towards the boat he saw that Gus was lying low, though the bold boy was still carrying on with his cooking over the paraffin stove. Gus meant them to have breakfast in spite of all the rifles in the world. If a shot should send Gus to the place where no breakfast is required, he would not need it then. Somebody else could get it.

Dick heaved a prayer of thankfulness that the boat was five hundred yards from the stream—a difficult shot if the unknown marksman suddenly decided to put a bullet under the water-line. Dick vaguely wondered what he would do if the craft were scuttled. A deadly silence had fallen over the island again. Dick stuck up his cap. Crack! A bullet flattened itself against the rock.

Harry Eyton crawled upstream a hundred yards and waited for another shot to show the enemy's location. When it rang out he raised his head carefully and peered over the bank. Two hundred yards in front of him he could see Schmidt. The fat fellow was lying behind a log with his eyes fixed and his rifle trained upon Dick's boulder. He had not scrupled to shoot at them in cold blood, so Harry did not hesitate. Very calmly he raised his rifle, aligned its sights upon Schmidt's head, and pressed the trigger.

He heard the man's yelp of pain, cursed his luck that he had missed his head, because a man shot through the head does not yelp, and, scrambling to his feet, dashed towards him across the open.

It seemed as if that yelp had been a signal to the whole island. Suddenly it awoke. From two points of the compass a mob of black fellows rushed forth with blood-curdling screams, and bore down upon Schmidt. But Harry was there first. He halted, kicked Schmidt's rifle beyond his reach, laid down his own rifle, and held up his right hand in token of friendship.

The black fellows halted at ten paces and, lowering the points of their spears, gazed curiously at the new-comers. They were trying to puzzle out why two white men should be trying to kill each other.

"Him fellah blood," one of the group said, pointing to the grovelling Schmidt. Harry's shot had only smashed one of his fingers, but he was livid with fear of the natives.

"Him fellah blood," the same black repeated.

"Ah, you speak English," cried Harry. "Him bad fellah. Savvy? No good. No bon. Rotten." He spat on the ground to show how rotten Schmidt was. All the blacks spat on the ground. They evidently had no sympathy for a man who snivelled just because he happened to have lost a finger. "Me very good," said Harry, with an utter lack of modesty. "Me dam good."

One of the blacks grinned broadly, and Harry responded. In a moment they were all standing grinning to each other like long-lost brothers. Because there is a something in a smile which makes the whole world kin.

" I would like to have a squint at your rifle," said Harry to the German, who was still shivering on his haunches. " Oh, I see the secret of your deadly aim now—telescopic sights. It's unsporting to use those things to shoot a beast ; it's a dashed bit more unsporting to use them to shoot a man."

" Blast you," cried Schmidt. " I only wish I had drilled you with them. Where's that boy ? Did he stop one ? "

" He still looks healthy. Here he is coming to have a dekko at you."

Dick had come from his cover and was running towards them.

" Who was firing, Harry ? " His eyes fell upon Schmidt. " Why, it's our old pal turned up again."

Schmidt uttered a squeal of terror as one of the blacks levelled his spear at his throat. It seemed to be the custom of the Loompopians to put all wounded out of their pain.

" Steady on," cried Dick. " We are not going to allow that."

" Him fellah blood."

" Never mind him fellah blood," said Dick

sternly. "When did you arrive here, Schmidt?"

"Yesterday. Please—please don't let them kill me, Mr. Stannard. I'll do anything for you. I'll give you back the map. I'll——"

"All we want is the truth, and no whining. Where is the boat you came in?"

"Behind that rock over there."

"Did you manage the boat all by yourself?"

"Yes; oh, please—please——"

The native who knew a little English had been trying hard to follow the conversation, and he interposed here with the remark, "Him two fellah. Black fellah lookee see."

Dick and Harry stared at him and shook their heads to show they did not understand, and the black man went through a dumb show to illustrate his meaning. He shaded his eyes with his hand and stared out to sea. He pointed to Schmidt and held up two fingers. "Two fellahs." Then he pointed his spear like a gun, cried "Bang!" and pretended to fall back dead.

"I'm hanged if I know what he's driving at," Harry muttered.

Dick's brows were knitted in perplexity. Suddenly the black man seized Dick's arm and guided him rapidly to a fissure in the rocks. To Dick's horror he saw the body of the Eurasian who had lured him and Gus into Sing Lee's chandu shop. The man was dead, with a bullet wound through the back of his head.

"Him fellah," exclaimed the native excitedly, pointing to Schmidt.

Dick blazed with anger as the truth dawned upon him.

"This finishes you, Schmidt," he said slowly. "This man came with you in a boat from Singapore. Whether he came willingly or was shanghaied we shall never know. But you seem to have shot him."

"It was a fair fight," wailed Schmidt. "He—oh—please——"

"Shut up. He was shot from behind. If this is murder, you know the penalty. I'm in charge here——"

Schmidt was in an extremity of fear as he listened to Dick's words. He knew that in the wild, far from a court of justice, the three chums would not hesitate to give him a fair trial,

and execute judgment afterwards. Already he could feel the noose around his neck.

"Him fellah blood," the native repeated grimly.

Schmidt suddenly sprang to his feet.

"Don't try any monkey tricks or I shall dot you one," Harry cautioned him.

But Schmidt was not in a fighting mood. With trembling fingers he threw aside his coat and tore open his shirt. From a leather bag tied round his waist he drew out a white glistening object and held it aloft. The ivory idol!

A low murmur passed round the group of black men as they gazed in awe at the sacred fetish.

Harry Eyton made a step forward to seize Schmidt, but a dozen levelled spears immediately barred his way, and next minute the natives were prostrate before Schmidt, rubbing their foreheads in the dust at his feet.

His eyes were gleaming with triumph.

"Little ivory idol," he cried in joy. "You are opening up the way for me—the way to Loompopo's millions."

The sudden turn of events overwhelmed Dick and Harry with astonishment. "Ai ! Ai ! Ai !" came in a chorus from the ground. They were worshipping Schmidt as men worship their god.

CHAPTER XIV

THE POWER OF THE IVORY IDOL

IT was a bitter moment when the two chums had to stand helpless and see the uncanny influence of the ivory idol over the minds of the superstitious savages. Schmidt was beside himself with glee as they fawned on him like dogs fawning on a master.

"Now we shall see who wins," he cried, shaking his fist towards Dick and Harry. "Before another day passes I'll have you where that nigger with the bullet through his head is. I killed him. See, I killed him as I will kill you and all who get in my way. I'm top dog now, curse you." He kicked one of the men at his feet and pointed to his finger, "Hi, you, get some water."

The black at once ran to the stream for water,

and another got a cool plantain leaf to wrap round the wounded hand.

"Will we give him a fight for it?" muttered Harry to Dick. "We have our rifles, and a few rounds would scatter this lot. We've got to get that idol. It's yours. Say the word, dart over to that rock, and we'll blaze away."

"No," said Dick. "I don't believe in messing these lads about too much. They don't know any better. I couldn't pull a trigger on them."

"They'll go for us quick enough when Schmidt tips them the word."

"If they turn nasty to us, we'll fight. Not before."

At that moment a loud halloo came to them over the water, and Gus could be seen standing up in the boat waiting to know what he had to do.

"Get back to the boat," Dick said to Harry. "We'll walk back slowly, facing this lot all the way. If any of them try to stop us, drop him."

But the blacks showed not the slightest interest in their movements, and Schmidt was so busy having his hand bandaged that he did

not notice their withdrawal. Dick, Gus, and Harry held a council of war as they hastily gobbled down some breakfast.

"I don't see what we are going to do," said Dick. "Schmidt has got in first, and they seem to take him for some kind of god. It makes me sick to see how they're snivelling around him, and he's the dirtiest, unwashed skunk that—— What do you think we should do, Gus?"

"Have some more coffee and don't worry. They can't bash us so long as we stay in the boat, and Schmidt can't shoot at us with his dummy hand. I'd say, sit tight and see what happens."

"Why not show them that diploma you have," Harry suggested. "They might crawl around and kiss your big toe too when they see it."

"I'm not going to risk that. Schmidt has the faked diploma and the faked map that he bagged in the rat-pit; but if he sees the genuine articles he will be wanting them, and I'm not parting with that map so long as I've a breath left in my body. Schmidt has

influence over these fellows, and he'll set the whole lot on to us."

"Let them try it. We've lots of ammunition," said Harry.

"No. I didn't come out here to kill them. I was sent to help them. Hang it, I can't see what's the best thing to be done."

"We'll soon know all about it," remarked Gus. "Here's a mob of them coming to see us."

The chums had pushed out and anchored six yards from the shore, so they had no cause to fear sudden attack from the group of about fifty who came leaping over the rocks towards them. It would take only a minute to cut loose and back away with full speed astern. But the natives showed no signs of being hostile.

"They're a pretty hefty lot," said Gus. "These lads should be able to put up a decent fight for themselves. I can't understand their admiration for a worm like Schmidt."

At that distance they had a good view of the men, and the remark of Gus was perfectly justified. All of them were six feet in height at

least and broad in proportion. Naked except for loin cloths, their bodies were splendid specimens of perfect physical development. With not an ounce of superfluous flesh, but with muscles that stood out like knotted cords, they leaped lightly from rock to rock and halted at the edge of the water.

The fellow who tried to act as interpreter jabbered, "Hi, fellah, good," followed by a jumble of unintelligible sounds.

"I expect he is trying to say Good-morning," said Gus. "Rummage around and see if you can get them some of that tuck we brought specially for them."

Dick found a pound bag of hard pink sweets and tossed it ashore. The big fellow caught it deftly, tasted one, poured the sweets into his hand, and crammed the lot into a mouth as big as a tobacco pouch. He grinned with delight as his white teeth munched them up.

"You're a greedy little boy," cried Gus. "Why don't you pass round the bag like a gentleman? Here's another bag, and it's all you are going to get. Pass them round."

The bag was tossed high in the air, and the

chums roared with laughter as fifty full-grown men jumped and scrambled like kids to get them. One of the sweets rolled into the sea, and without any hesitation a black dived like a porpoise for it and got it.

“ This settles it,” said Dick ; “ I’m going on. The guv’nor told me to report to Queen Selulla, and I’m going. You two stay here and guard the boat as our base. If I am not back in three days you——”

“ Oh, chuck that,” said Gus. “ We are going with you, and we are taking all our stores.” He cried to the man with his mouth full of sweets, “ I say, Steve, Queen Selulla ! Savvy ? Selulla ! ”

They understood his remark all right, for they pointed to the interior of the island and repeated, “ Selulla.”

“ Push in to the shore,” said Dick. “ We were told to go there, and we shall go. Schmidt can do as he likes. But don’t let him think we have another map in our possession.”

Within half an hour they unloaded all their stores and portioned them out among the natives, who were only too willing to act as

bearers. "Right away," cried Dick. Leaving the boat riding at anchor, he took his place with the interpreter at the head of the long file of men, with Harry and Gus bringing up the rear. It was then they noticed that Schmidt and the other crowd of natives had already pushed on into the island.

The next three hours were grilling. Dick was eager to get on and see what lay before them ; but the path at first was uphill, and the sun was blazing hot and seemed to melt the marrow in his bones. In the shade of the tropical forest they entered next the atmosphere was like an oven. Not a breath of wind ever penetrated those gloomy depths, cactus and thorns lay across the hard path, and sweat streamed from Dick's body like water. As he fought on, gasping for breath, he could not help admiring the wonderful endurance shown by the man in front. Though he had a heavy box of ammunition on his shoulder, his step never faltered nor did he show any signs of fatigue. From time to time he looked back to grin encouragement.

And the most galling moment of all was when

they came to a clearing and caught sight of Schmidt's party half a mile in front. Schmidt was not sweating. Schmidt was not gasping for breath. Dick rubbed his eyes and gazed with surprise. The huge, hulking brute was reclining on a litter borne by four men, who were trotting. As Dick gazed he could see Schmidt raise himself on his elbow to belabour one of his men over the head with a stick. They showed no resentment, but trotted faster.

Dick wiped the sweat from his eyes and pushed on. The last lap in the race for Loompopo's millions had begun.

It was late afternoon when they came to the capital of Loompopo, a cluster of bamboo huts sheltering under the trees, and a crowd of natives swarmed out to meet the new-comers. Dick and his pals were staggering through exhaustion, but they perked up to show that white men never say die. They formed up their party as they halted, and put their stores in a heap ; then Harry Eyton lost his temper at the sight of two things which greeted his eyes. The first was the sight of the sea. They had crossed right over the island, and Harry was wild

at the thought of their walking and sweating and gasping when they might have sailed their boat round with no labour at all and in half the time. The second sight was Schmidt. He was leaning back lazily on a bed of dried grass and leaves. A native stood behind him fanning him with a giant leaf. Another on his knees was offering him a long cooling drink in a gourd. Schmidt grinned as he graciously was pleased to accept it.

"You confounded swine," blazed Harry, "I'm not going to stick this. Hand over that ivory idol or I'll blessed well smash you into pulp."

For a moment Schmidt cowered before his anger. Then he took out the idol and held it in his hand. In an instant a hedge of spears formed round him to protect him.

"Him bad. Dam bad," blazed Harry to the interpreter.

"Yum," nodded the interpreter in agreement.

"Then how the dickens do you let him treat you like dogs? He bagged that idol. It belongs to Dick over there. Get it."

"Him Tua Yala."

"Tua Yala! Tua Yala!" the crowd responded in adoration.

"Listen to me," cried Schmidt. "I am warning you three for the last time. I have the idol. I have the map which to-morrow morning will show me where the treasure is. Do you think I am going to let you three stay here? Go now. For the last time, go! To-morrow, if you are still here, I'll have you flayed alive." He foamed at the mouth with insensate rage.

"Tua Yala! Tua Yala!" the crowd responded, swaying from side to side in unison like growing corn in a summer wind.

"They are working themselves up," cried Schmidt. "They are mine, body and soul. I am their god. By the time the moon arises I'll have the whole mob loose on you. What are three rifles against an army?"

"Tua Yala! Tua Yala!"

"I'll plug him where he lies," vowed Harry, but Dick pushed his rifle aside.

"Steady on, old boy. Keep a grip. It's three hours yet till the moon arises, and I've yet to see the queen. What's Gus doing?"



A hedge of spears formed round him to protect him.

Gus was unroping one of the packages.

"I'm going to have a swill," he replied. "A bath, a change, and some grub. We might as well die happy."

He drew off his singlet and, squeezing the sweat from it, made signs of washing. A boy brought him water in a pail.

Gus examined the vessel carefully. "It is an honest-to-goodness pail," he exclaimed. "It is a pail such as mother used to wash the baby in."

"A relic of trading days," Dick replied.

"The guv'nor said they used to trade here before the Chink pirates made it not worth while to risk a cargo. That thing has been here twenty years."

Gus signed that he wanted privacy for his bath, since he had no particular desire to strip and wash before the admiring eyes of a multitude, but he found it difficult to make himself understood.

"Me go there for washy-washy," he said, pointing to a much more secluded hut than the others, and which was surrounded by a high palisade.

"Selulla," the interpreter said.

"Oh lor', then I am not going there for a wash. Let me into one of the other huts."

When they understood his request they cleared out and left him, wondering at the strange ways of the white man, who will not wash unless he is alone. When Gus came out, Harry had his turn, but Dick would not. He was carrying a precious map and a diploma in the belt next his skin, and he was not going to risk any one seeing them. Schmidt might get them at the eleventh hour. Meanwhile Dick

had been asking again for Queen Selulla, but it appeared that her majesty was in no hurry to meet him.

"All we can do," he said to his chums later, "is to get out our bag of tricks and try to impress them. Schmidt has done it with the ivory idol, and we must go one better."

There, in Loompopo, where time does not count, the whole population gathered around when they knew the white visitors were arranging an entertainment. Dick looked eagerly to see if the queen would make her appearance. She did not. The two chocolate-coloured sentries at the entrance to her courtyard remained at their posts, and no one came out. So Dick had to carry on with the good work, to show how great and wonderful they were, how worthy to be received in audience by her majesty.

The proceedings began with a gramophone record of "Rule Britannia." Gus stuck in the needle, Harry wound up the machine, and Dick watched to see the effect on the audience. It proved to be what Harry called "a blooming washout."

Everybody was delighted with the music, but

only the kiddies showed any signs of wonder. Harry fired a blue rocket—that left them cold. He poured petrol from a tin into a hole in the ground and fired it with a flash pistol—they just waited to see what he was going to do with the fire. He blew smoke from a cigarette down his nostrils—they nodded to him. He removed his false teeth—the children crowed with delight, the elders remained unmoved. One or two on the outskirts of the crowd were sauntering off as if they were bored.

“This is a blooming washout,” groaned Harry.

“I expect they’ve seen all those things before,” said Gus. “If traders and Chinks have been coming here, they played those games long ago. This is where we’ve got to use our grey matter and think out something fresh. I see that swab Schmidt over there chuckling at us.”

Dick was silent. He knew at last that he had only one card to play, to show his diploma of knighthood of the Fire Mountain, and try to trump the ivory idol with it. He retired to the washing-hut a few minutes, and when he came out he whispered to his chums :

“ I’ve hidden the map. It’s buried a foot down inside that hut. Remember that Schmidt must never get it, never know there is such a thing. I am going to show the diploma and chance it.”

With a magnificent gesture he unfolded the document and exposed it to the interpreter. That worthy understood at once, but he did not fall upon his knees before Dick. Instead of doing that, he darted off to the queen with it. When he returned, he had a message :

“ Selulla lookee see.”

“ Which means,” said Gus, “ that her majesty is graciously pleased to see us.”

“ Big moon,” said the interpreter.

“ When the moon is up. Schmidt is going to kill us then. And Queen Selulla is going to grant us an interview. It should be rather a rum time.”

While they busied themselves looking out gifts fit for a queen, the interpreter was explaining to his people that the Knight of the Fire Mountain had come at last from over the black water to Loompopo. A wave of excitement ran through the natives’ minds. Surely

this was the golden year in their island's history, when the Tua Yala and the Knight of the Fire Mountain had both arrived at the one time.

But why, asked one of the men, had the Fire Knight stopped to play with the music box? Why had he sent up a blue light? Why had his friend taken out his teeth and shown them?

The interpreter shook his head. The way of the white man was past finding out. Even he, who was wise in the white man's language, could not understand those things. All white men were queer. Did they not go behind a rock or into a hut even to wash their bodies?

Fortunately for them their vain questionings were cut short by the beating of a drum near the queen's hut. One drum began, another joined in, another, and another, till from twenty assembled drums came the steady, monotonous beat.

“Tum-tum-tum-tum.”

The sound was heard in all the village and echoed far up the side of the Fire Mountain. Queen Selulla was calling her people to see Tua Yala and the wonderful Knight of Fire Mountain.

CHAPTER XV

QUEEN SELULLA

THE sun declined and sank behind the hills, and night came—the silent, mysterious night of Loompopo. But within an hour the moon was climbing up into the heavens and flooding land and sea with ghostly light.

Wishing to create an impression, the three chums waited inside their hut for the royal summons. Peeping through a chink in the wall, they watched the natives streaming into the royal enclosure, hundreds of them, all naked except for loin cloths, but every man armed with a spear. The drums commenced, “Tum-tum-tum-tum,” now beating quicker and rapping out a more insistent command. They streamed in like English crowds to a football match, and when all were inside, silence fell again.

“ Selulla lookee see.” The interpreter came at last with his message.

“ Here goes for the high jump,” said Gus. “ Do I look nice enough to meet a queen ? ”

He and Dick had put on white running shorts and blazers with their college colours. Harry was trying to look imposing in a poppy-coloured dressing-gown he had fished out of Dick’s kit.

Out in the open they halted to gaze round at Loompopo in moonlight. The moon was brighter than ever they had seen it in England. They could have read a book by its light. It seemed to be only one night short of full moon, and the light was so clear that every stick and stone cast a shadow. Behind them they could see Fire Mountain with a wisp of smoke curling round its summit. Though a horde of natives were within a few yards of them, not a sound broke the silence.

Entering the palisade, it was curious to see the natives squatting on their haunches in serried ranks, a dark mass in the moonlight, with only the whites of their eyes showing as they turned them to gaze at the visitors. Led by the interpreter, they passed down an alley to a position

of honour in front of the crowd and facing the royal hut.

In a minute somebody entered behind them, somebody borne on a litter, and the crowd whispered, "Tua Yala." It was Schmidt, who was carefully carried to a rude throne which had been prepared for him. He leered in triumph at the three chums as he was carried past them, and as soon as he was seated he made signs for a drink. Native spirits, raw and fiery, distilled from bananas, was brought, and he drank with relish. Dick could see that the man was already half-drunk with the stuff. His eyes were bloodshot and his hands trembled.

Dick vaguely wondered what devilish instinct in the native mind made them worship such a man. All eyes were now turned upon Schmidt, and the three chums were forgotten. Dick shivered slightly as his nerves became taut and his hands clenched with determination. They were surrounded on all sides by armed men who worshipped a beast, and that beast had threatened death to the three of them. Was the same moon shining down upon England and home and his dear old dad? At any rate they would

die game to the last, and Schmidt would die with them. Under that ridiculous dressing-gown Harry was carrying a revolver, and he had sworn that at the first sign of trouble he would blow Schmidt's brains out.

"Tum-tum-tum," the drums beat suddenly, and as suddenly ceased. A curtain at the royal door was drawn aside, and the queen stood in the doorway. Nobody moved or spoke.

The three chums gazed at her with curiosity, because upon her goodwill their lives depended. She was a tall, majestic figure, who held herself proudly like a queen. She came of a race that had known no conqueror. Only her arms and feet were bare, and on the copper skin precious stones sparkled in settings of gold. Her rounded figure was swathed in glistening purple.

Dick thought of the tinsel beads he had brought for her, and he groaned inwardly.

Ignoring her subjects and the three friends, the queen took several fluttering little steps till she stood face to face with Schmidt. Then, sinking at his feet, she put her forehead to the ground. It was a signal to the assembled



The queen stood in the doorway.

people, because they all bowed likewise, and the murmuring which Dick detested rose again: "Tua Yala! Tua Yala!" Schmidt very wisely sat still and tried to look god-like.

It was only when her deep obeisance to Schmidt was ended that the queen turned to Dick, who had remained standing, and she spoke to him in a language that once perhaps had been English.

"Good-morning," she said solemnly, and before Dick could resist, she pressed her brow

against his. "Good-morning," she said to Harry, and repeated the process. Gus suppressed a tendency to squirm when his turn came, remembering that he must be polite to a lady.

"You this?" asked the queen, showing the diploma to Dick.

"Yes, Queen Selulla. My father sent me. Colonel Stannard."

"Stannard." Yes, she knew. "Good. Good. Him——?" she laid her head on her folded hands and closed her eyes.

"No, not dead. Sick. He sent me when he had your message."

"Good."

"What are we to do for you?"

She did not understand his question, for she looked at him in a perplexed way, then said, "Lookee, see." She went back to the door of her hut, and signed to an old white-haired man whom Dick had not seen before. This man could speak broken English fairly well, and the conversation began.

"Long time ago," he spoke very slowly, and Dick found little difficulty in piecing together

his words, "long time ago this fellah," pointing to himself, "work for big white man Stannard. Dam fine boss. White man come here. Good. Fellah sick, white man pill. Fellah plenty water," sweeping his arm round the island. "Plenty water, plenty fly. White man finish water."

"Wait a moment," said Dick. "I don't understand that."

"He means they drained swamps," said Gus. "Let him go on."

"White man buy, sell. Queen Selulla like white man." And as they became accustomed to the old man's jargon they could put his meaning into more refined diction.

"These white men traded with us. The best white man was Colonel Stannard. The queen was only a girl then, and one day she showed him her treasure: gold, diamonds, rubies, and pearls, which the Loompopians long ago carried off in wars with Burma. For her own safety, Colonel Stannard made the queen hide her treasure in a cave which is known only to him and to the queen. He took away a magic piece of paper which would tell

any man where the cave was, and he said the queen was to let him know if ever the treasure was in any danger. He would come, since he had advised her how to hide it.

"Then yellow men came from the north, Chinese men. They heard of the treasure and spoke to the queen. She was like one who was deaf and dumb ; but they tortured the queen's prime minister till he told of Colonel Stannard hiding the treasure. They tortured the prime minister to know the exact place. The prime minister did not know. The prime minister died.

"Yellow men went away, but four moons ago more yellow men came in a big ship that thundered. A big storm arose and battered the ship. Three moons ago yellow men came back again, but the queen and her people hid till the yellow men had gone. She sent her message, her S.O.S., to Colonel Stannard, and now she wants his son to wait till the yellow men come again and drive them away.

"That is Queen Selulla's message," the man concluded.

"Phew !" whistled Gus, who had been

drinking in every word eagerly. "The lady doesn't want much. It seems that three of us have to stay here and beat back a Chinese invasion, and they seem to come on a ship carrying big guns."

"Sing Lee and the Green Dragon," observed Dick. "On the other side they have been trying to get at dad for the map, here they have been trying to get at the queen. I suppose that is why she keeps herself so carefully shut away from new-comers."

"It's a bit to ask for," Harry Eyton commented. "I don't mind having a scrap with a dozen or two, but when it comes to a ship's crew with guns, I suppose we're pretty well booked for kingdom come."

The assembly was waiting for Dick's answer. The old man spoke again: "Selulla waits an answer from the white boss."

"Tell her we shall stay," said Dick.

The news passed round, and an excited jabbering broke out among the throng.

"Where does Schmidt come in this trip?" Gus whispered to his leader.

"Stay," cried Dick in a loud voice. "We

three stay to help your warriors drive the yellow men into the sea, but I must be chief."

"No savvy chief."

"Savvy boss ? "

"You are son of white boss. You are boss."

"Then this man," pointing to Schmidt, "must be put away. He is a murderer. He must be tried according to the law of Loompopo."

His angry gesture towards Schmidt made most of his meaning clear. The wildest hubbub ensued among the natives. After a hurried consultation with the queen the old man spoke again :

"You are boss. This man is Tua Yala. No one touch him. He is sacred. You drive back yellow man, he drive back Fire Mountain." He swept his arm towards the wisp of smoke hanging over the mountain-top.

"Tua Yala ! Tua Yala ! " the people cried.

"Then I am not taking on the order," said Dick to his pals. "I am going to quit if that ape is allowed to——"

Dick's sentence was never finished.

As he spoke, a sound like the sighing of the wind came from the sea, swelled to the roar of a train rushing over their heads, and a terrific crash shattered the silence of the forest behind them. The people rose with a yell and rushed terror-stricken to the gap in the palisade. A dozen fell on the way, and their companions trampled them down in their wild rush for safety.

Again the sound was heard.

“ S-sh—bang ! ”

Dick and his chums darted to the queen's side to lend her their aid. Schmidt was wriggling on the ground in a frantic effort to crawl under his throne. The queen's warriors were bolting like rabbits. Selulla seemed to be the only calm person on the island. In an even voice she told Dick the cause of all the terror.

“ Yellow man come,” said she.

“ Look, Dick,” cried Harry, who had clambered to the roof of the royal hut. “ It's a Chinese ship out there. They're shelling the island.”

“ S-sh—bang ! ”

“Come on. Get your rifles. Down to the beach.” Harry was bawling like mad to make himself heard. “They’re going to land. Tell that lot to lie down. There’s another. Down ! Oh, my God, it’s dropped among them.”

CHAPTER XVI

CHINESE TORTURE

DICK, Gus, and Harry darted hither and thither among the terrified natives, trying to get them quiet, to keep them calm, and the presence of the white men had the desired effect. The blacks were shepherded to the lee side of a rock, and there they had time to pull themselves together and marvel at the miracle that they had not all been blown into a red mist. To them it was a miracle. On the previous occasion when they had been shelled they had run about like sheep and suffered many casualties, many of them had been blown into a red mist ; now the white man had taught them to keep cool and take cover, to keep their heads down and their hearts up. They squatted down and heard the shells screaming harmlessly overhead.

Meanwhile Dick and Gus were bringing in the wounded, whose cries for help were pitiable, and Harry, with a night glass trained on the ship, was reporting the movements of the enemy.

“ They have only one gun in action. Sounds like an eighteen-pounder. There she comes. Oh, a dud ! They have their boats swung out. When they land, where shall we hold them, Dick ? ”

“ What’s that ? Jerk up some of those lads to get water, Gus. Water ! Make them do it. What’s that you said, Harry ? ”

“ Where should we hold them if they try to land ? ”

“ On the beach. Are they coming yet ? ”

“ Not yet. Another dud ! Yes, down on the beach would be the best place. They’re swinging out their third boat. Give Gus a shout to get a box of ammunition ready.”

“ Gus, ammunition. Have those blighters gone for water yet ? Well, tell them to shut up.”

“ They’re lowering their boats. Twenty men in each. Never mind the wounded.

Let's get down. This way, and keep in the shadow."

The landing-place for the village at Loompopo was ideal for defence. The bay was shaped like the mouth of a funnel, with the wide mouth towards the sea, and narrowing as it came in. An inlet of the sea, with sandy bottom, came right back almost to the village. Nearest to the sea the inlet was half a mile wide, bordered on each side by cliffs; next to the village the inlet narrowed to a hundred yards, and the rocks were only twenty feet high. An ideal place for defence. And with only three rifles against sixty men, the defenders needed all the advantage the ground could give them.

Dragging a box of ammunition behind them, the three chums ran forward in the shadow of the rocks till they came to the wet sand.

"Separate to twenty yards," directed Harry. "And when they come within range, blaze away."

Leaving Gus on the left, they ran till Dick halted to take up his position in the centre, and Harry ran farther to cover the right flank. All three lay down flat, rammed home cartridges,

laid a pile of ammunition ready to hand, and waited.

The light was perfect for shooting. They could see distinctly the three boats rowing in, could see even the water-drops sparkling as they dropped from the oars as they swung back. When they were five hundred yards off, Harry's rifle spoke. Crack! It was impossible to see what damage he did. Crack! Crack! The three boats separated, and each of the three watchers automatically ranged on the boat in his immediate front.

At four hundred yards both Dick and Gus opened fire, and soon a lively fusillade was being kept up on the invaders. Suddenly a whistle sounded, the boats retired out of range, and could be seen closing in towards each other.

"They're retiring," cried Dick joyfully.

"They're only having a pow-wow," bawled Harry. "Keep on the alert, lads. They're sure to come again."

Soon it could be seen that the boats' commander had only been changing his tactics. They formed up in file, one behind the other, and advanced at a much faster pace. Across

the prow of the leading boat, which was the only target showing, the Chinks had thrown up a bale of folded sailcloth. From behind it two marksmen kept potting away at the three little black shadows on the shore. The Chinks came nearer and nearer. Once they landed on the beach, they could overwhelm the defenders by sheer weight of numbers.

It was evident that three rifles could not hold the beach, and Dick got to his feet and, running towards Harry, dropped down beside him.

"We can't do it," he gasped. "We can't hold them here. You go back and get a hundred natives with spears. Go like blazes, and shoot any man who refuses. Line them up back there where the beach is narrower. Wait till the Chinks land. Then tell them to yell like devils and charge in. We can sweep them back if the blacks fight game."

"What about you two here?" asked Harry anxiously.

"Do what you're told," roared Dick. "We are hanging on here for five minutes to give you covering fire, then we'll retire on to you. Now, run like blazes."

Harry scrambled to his feet and ran as he had never run before.

"Gus," yelled Dick. "Keep it up, old boy. Keep it up."

"Right-o!" Gus summoned all his strength for that cheerful shout, though he knew he could not keep it up much longer. His right boot had been shot away, and a stream of red was dyeing the sand beside him.

For two minutes they blazed away till their rifles were red-hot and the bolts were getting stiff, and then they had their first spell of bad luck. A cloud drifted across the moon. The sea became dark.

"Retire, Gus!" cried Dick.

There was no answer.

"Gus! Get back. Gus!"

Dick sped in the direction of his chum, and found him lying still with his head bent over his rifle butt. He seized him by the belt to fling him over his shoulder. He had never thought that Gus was so heavy. Then the moon reappeared and shed down its light. Dick caught a glimpse of a horde of men splashing through the water towards him. They raised a savage

cry when they saw him. Dropping his friend, Dick stood over him and prepared for a hand-to-hand fight. One lad against fifty yellow heathen with blood lust in their hearts.

Far back in the rear, Harry was almost at the village when the last bullet of the battle got him—a stray bullet. He felt a hot, searing pain strike his head with a sharp impact. Uttering a cry, he pitched forward on his face. His fingers clutched convulsively at the sand. Then he knew no more.

When Harry came to himself it was broad daylight, and he lay blinking as he tried to recollect what had happened. He had been told to run back and rouse up the blacks; he had run back, he had been running back, he—— With an effort he raised himself on his elbow and stared round at the black, friendly faces surrounding him.

“Dick, Gus,” he muttered feebly.

“Two white boss there.” The interpreter pointed towards the beach, and Harry with an effort raised himself and gazed seaward. The Chinks had won the beach. Where were Dick and Gus? Harry closed his eyes as his head

swam with faintness and with horror at the first thought that occurred to him. They were in the hands of Chinks. They were dead or, a thousand times worse, the Green Dragon was burying its claws in their living flesh. But a greater mystery—why had the Chinks not swarmed up and captured the village when there had not been a soul left to defend it? Harry motioned to a black to bring him his field glasses.

On the beach he saw about thirty or forty Chinks, and with joy he saw that Dick and Gus were among them still alive. They were trussed up to two posts which the Loompopians kept for mooring their canoes at low water. Why on earth had the Chinks called a halt in their advance? Harry next saw a boat putting out from the ship, with a man seated in the stern-sheets who seemed to be a leader of some kind. His head was swathed in bandages.

That gave Harry a clue, and he pieced together, quite correctly as he discovered later, the various stages of the fight. Having suffered several casualties, the Chinks had landed and taken the two chums prisoners. But their

leader had fallen with a wound in the head. Chinks have no stomach for a fight when they meet with sharp opposition, and with the loss of their leader they had desisted from the fight. Now their leader was putting out to them again, and they had their two prisoners ready with which to appease him.

Dick and Gus recognized Sing Lee at once, though his head was wrapped in bandages and his suave look was replaced by a look of fiendish ferocity. He had a heavy pistol in his hand. As soon as he landed he strode towards one of his subordinates. There ensued a fierce, guttural dispute between the two, and Sing Lee finished it by crashing the butt of the pistol full in the man's teeth. He went down like a log and spat out teeth. That was his punishment for not pushing home the attack against the village.

Up near the village a man, watching every movement through glasses, beckoned to a black to bring him a rifle. They brought him Schmidt's, the rifle with telescopic sights.

Sing Lee turned to the two chums and spat contemptuously in their faces.

“ You two English pups again ! The Green Dragon does not loosen its grip a second time. Who was the other man with you ? ”

They gave no answer.

“ You will not speak ? I shall loosen your tongues for you. Will you speak ? ”

“ It depends upon what you want us to say,” said Dick.

“ Is Schmidt on the island ? ”

“ He is.”

Sing Lee's face became contorted with rage, and he broke out with a stream of guttural invective in his own language. Then he spoke in English : “ That man is a swine, a white-faced pig, like all white men. To-day I shall tear his living heart out and let him see it beating. He is a traitor to the Green Dragon. He will die—slowly. Has he the map ? ”

“ He has a map,” answered Dick truthfully.

“ Do you remember anything written on the map ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ What do you remember ? ”

“ I shall not tell you.”

“ Bah, you whelp. We know how to make

you speak. In my ship there I have all I need to make you wish you had never been born. Will you speak ? ”

“ No.”

“ You will get the cage.”

Dick made no answer.

“ You will hang by the chin through the bottom of a wicker cage till you scream. This other pup will have the iron pipe with a hungry rat in it. When we put the open end of the pipe against his stomach and heat the other end, the rat will tear its way out—out through his white body. We shall cut your eyelids off, and let the sun bore a burning hole into your brain. We will trickle water down your gaping throat, drop by drop, till blood bursts from your ears. Now will you speak ? ”

“ Only one thing,” said Dick : “ talking about water, I wish you would give my pal here a drink. He’s wounded in the foot, and I think he is going to faint again.”

“ Bring the pincers,” cried Sing Lee, exasperated at the lad’s coolness. “ Pull that whelp’s finger nails out by the roots till he screams for mercy.”

Gus rallied his strength to speak.

“ Sing Lee ! He—it was he who went back into the rat-pit of your chandu shop and brought you out.”

“ Whimpering already, are you ? ”

“ Not for myself. For him.”

“ He is white. That is enough for me. Schmidt is a white man. All white men are dogs.” He turned to his followers, “ Cuida, cuida ! ”—“ Hurry, hurry ! ”

A Chink with a pair of pliers in his hand approached Dick and loosened one of his hands. Dick felt the iron gripping his thumb nail, felt a spasm of excruciating agony, and sank his teeth in his bottom lip to hold back his cry. And next minute—the man crumpled up at Dick’s feet.

“ Crack ! ” A rifle echoed from the village. Dick opened his eyes and saw blood pouring from the Chinaman’s neck into the thirsty sand.

From the village Harry Eyton watched every movement. He saw the man fall, the look of surprise on Dick’s face, the look of demoniac rage on Sing Lee’s. The leader grabbed the



The man crumpled up at Dick's feet.

instrument of torture from the dead man's hand and pounced upon Dick, cunningly keeping himself sheltered from fire behind the lad's body.

Dick writhed and rolled his head in agony. His head drooped forward, and Sing Lee's head

was exposed without his knowing it. It was a long shot, and it needed to be a steady shot. The slightest deviation to the right and Harry would shoot his own friend. But Harry did not falter. In the telescopic sight of the rifle there were two hair lines, one vertical and the other horizontal. Harry steadied the rifle till the two lines intersected over Sing Lee's bandaged head. Then gently he pressed the trigger, gently, gently, till—

“Crack !”

Harry almost swooned with joy. Sing Lee had fallen in a heap over the body of the dead Chink.

Harry was no milk-sop. His nerves were of steel, but for a moment he closed his eyes and breathed a prayer of thankfulness. When he opened his eyes again he saw the Chinks picking up the two bodies and scampering back to the shelter of the rocks, leaving Dick and Gus still tied to their posts out in the open.

“Stick it, lads,” Harry murmured to himself. “You're both going to have the devil of a time out there in the sun without water. But if any Chink goes near you, he is a gone

coon, and I won't take a drink all day myself just to keep you company."

Without taking his eyes from the beach, he signed to the interpreter :

" Tell every man on this blasted island he's got to fight to-night."

" Yellow man come, boss ? "

" They are not coming now. They will come as soon as it gets dark. And if black man do not fight yellow man, I'll drill holes in the whole blessed lot of you till your heads are like watering-cans. Savvy ? Go. Get spears."

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLE OF EYTON

HARRY EYTON feverishly prepared for the attack which he was sure would come as soon as darkness fell. He kept one eye on Dick and Gus to protect them, not letting them for a moment out of his sight ; the other eye he kept on his chocolate-coloured army.

His was no easy task. In the space of three hours he had to create a band of disciplined fighters out of a mob, to lick them into shape, to place them in their battle positions ; and he was a wounded man himself. But he had several advantages. The funnel-shaped bay was adapted for defence. His men were plucking up courage. The Chinese leader had been twice wounded ; perhaps he was dead. So, in this way, Harry weighed up his chances and saw

that two points were essential. He must take the Chinks by surprise, and he must make a quick job of them or they would immediately wreak vengeance upon their two tethered prisoners.

"Get out all the jam tins," Harry ordered the interpreter.

"No savvy jam."

Harry walked to the heap of stores carried up from the boat, yanked out a dozen tins of jam, scooped out the sticky stuff and let the natives lap it up. Their eyes gleamed with satisfaction. Surely the ways of the white men were past finding out. Instead of a fight, jam. They sucked their fingers cheerfully and decided to become fighting men for life.

Harry filled up the tins with pebbles and scraps of iron, stuck a stick of explosive in each, passed a fuse through a hole in the lid, and sealed the tins to make them air-tight.

"Bang! Bang! Bang!" he explained dramatically, and tried to picture Chinks having their arms and legs blown away.

Then he marshalled the armed population of the village, and for two solid hours explained,

exhorted, threatened, and encouraged them till he was sure his meaning had got through.

“Black man fight?” he asked finally.

“Tua Yala.” The interpreter stood up and pointed to the summit of Fire Mountain. The cloud of smoke issuing from the volcano was denser than on the previous day. But Harry was too busy to trouble about volcanoes.

“Oh, hang Tua Yala,” he exclaimed. “If it’s Schmidt you mean, I don’t know where he is. You can bet he’s lying low till the scrapping is over. What I want to know is, will black man fight? Savvy? Help me to give yellow man big licks?”

“Yah. Tua Yala. Black man fight.”

“Then listen and I’ll go all over it again. And tell those fellahs there has to be no noise, no tum-tum-tum or any of that rot. They have to keep as mum-mum-mum as a lot of black goldfish till a blue light goes up, then they have to jump, and yell, and kill, kill, kill. Savvy? Now listen——”

At sunset silence brooded over Loompopo, and though two hundred men were lying along the sides of the funnelled bay, not a sound from

them could be heard, not a glimpse of them could be seen. The Chinks had landed other two boatloads. Harry was sweating with excitement lest his blacks should give away the game too soon. But they were perfect. They were accustomed to lying low in pursuit of game. Harry next began to worry lest they should lie too low and funk getting up when he gave the signal. Everything depended upon prompt obedience. The lives of Dick and Gus depended on it.

The sky in the west faded from golden to purple, and dark shadows of evening began to creep across the bay. This was the time, Harry knew, when wild beasts prowl, when yellow men wilder than beasts creep forth to massacre man, woman, and child.

What was that? A boot scraping against a pebble? Harry heard—and peered. The Chinks were coming: one hundred and fifty of them, silent as a horde of rats. Harry could feel his heart thumping.

“Wait, black boys,” he murmured excitedly. “Wait for it.”

Nearer and nearer the Chinks came, up to-

wards the narrow end of the funnel. Already they had passed beyond the lines of black men lining the cliffs above them. Sheltered under a dark blanket, Harry lit his first fuse. It burned evenly. He lit another. Then when the first was almost exploding he tossed them down among the invaders.

“Bang! Bang!” Two vivid flashes split the darkness. Two loud detonations shattered the silence of the night. A yell of terror rose from the Chinks, mingled with the yells of men in agony.

“Two more,” murmured Harry. “Wait, you black beauties. Wait for it. There now. Chinks, divide those two among you.”

“Bang! Bang!”

At the same moment Harry fired a blue rocket from his pistol and sprang to his feet shouting :

“Ya—ha! Ya—ha! Now, lads, get into them.”

It seemed as if hell had broken loose on the island. Black men dropped themselves from the rocks, leaped upon the foe, and thrust, thrust, thrust with their spears. Yellow men shrieked with terror and pain, black men yelled

with triumph, and yellow men's hearts turned faint. The Chinks turned to run. But the blacks were between them and the sea. And from the cliff top a fiendish voice bawled and roared :

“ Ya — ha ! Ya — ha ! Rumble 'em up. That's the stuff to give 'em.”

That was the crowning hour in the history of Loompopo, and by a stroke of good luck an event occurred which made victory a dead certainty. A sheet of lurid flame suddenly spurted from the Fire Mountain, and the earth rumbled. The spirits of the fire world were aiding the black man. With loud cries of “ Tua Yala, Tua Yala ! ” they smote and slew and cut to pieces.

The Chinese retreated into the village, and the ship out in the bay began to throw shells among its own men. Within half an hour after the rocket had signalled the attack, the Chinese were scattered, and the noise of battle became more and more distant.

As soon as Harry saw that all was well he dropped and ran towards his two chums. He slashed their bonds with his knife ; but both

of them fell to the ground through faintness. Harry ran back again to load willing natives with blankets, water, and medical restoratives. Dick opened his eyes first.

“ Drink this,” said Harry.

“ Gus,” was Dick’s first word. “ Gus.”

“ He is all right, old boy. Drink some more.”

“ Never mind me. Watch Gus. Oh lor’, this—this pain is awful.”

“ It’s your blood beginning to circulate again. Here, boy, savvy massage ? Rub, rub his legs and arms like this. He’s all pins and needles.”

In half an hour Gus had recovered consciousness and was being bandaged on his wounded foot ; and Dick, by sheer will power, was pulling himself together to listen to Harry’s account of the fight.

“ But where are the Chinks now ? ” he was asking.

“ All over the place. None came back this way.”

“ None came back ? ”

“ No.”

Dick screwed himself round, and saw that the ship was still there with her lights showing.

“Strike me pink!” cried Harry. “I see what you are thinking, Dick. Wait till I get some men scraped together.”

“Hurry up,” said Dick. “The moon will soon be over the mountain, but we have a chance. Get our revolvers when you are up there.”

Harry dashed off in the darkness, and returned with a crew of blacks. By that time Dick had two Chinese boats unmoored, for the Chinks had left no guard over them.

“Steer due east,” he told Harry. “Go round in a circle and come astern of the ship. I’ll keep two lengths behind. Will you be comfortable enough till we come back again, Gus?”

“Not likely. If I can’t walk or row I am coming as ballast. Give me your arm down.”

When the blacks saw the stratagem their hearts filled with joy. They were thoroughly at home on the water, and victory had made them bold. They pulled with a will, and the two boats shot over the waves.

Dick kept an anxious eye on the sky, because in a short time the moon would be making

everything as clear as daylight. Ah, Harry was veering west at last, making a wide circle to come up to the ship unobserved. The moon peeped over Fire Mountain.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry," Harry kept whispering to his men. "If they see us out here, we'll all go to feed the fishes. Hurry, hurry, hurry."

They understood his meaning, and put their backs into their work, and just as the moon began to flood the sea with silvery light they shipped their oars and glided into the shadow of the ship. There was a slight bump when the first boat touched. They held their breath and listened. There was not a sound from above them, though they could hear men speaking away at the fore part of the ship. Harry swarmed up the anchor cable and peered over. The broad deck glistened white in the moonlight. Ten or twelve men were lining the hand-rail in the fore part ; but they were all gazing towards the shore, not in the least alarmed by what they had heard of the battle. They had heard the shouts and screams, had heard them fading away, and that was all according to plan. Their comrades had massacred the men in the

village, and were now in pursuit of the women and children.

Suddenly Harry's blood froze and his heart missed a beat. He was within six feet of a solitary Chink, who had been detailed to keep a look-out towards the sea. But his thoughts were fixed upon the island's treasure, and he was worrying more about his share than his watch duty. Harry pulled himself up and crept towards the man. He would require to make a clean job of him. Three feet from him he halted, stretched his fingers wide, and grasped the man's throat from behind. The fellow gurgled for a minute ; but Harry's grip did not relax. Slowly he squeezed till the convulsive kickings ceased and the man sank into unconsciousness. Lashing a rope round him, Harry lowered him to the boat below. He intended the man to be kept prisoner. But a huge Loompopian took him in his arms, untied the rope, and dropped him quietly overboard. A white shape flashed through the water, and a hammer-headed shark seized its supper greedily and pulled it under.

No time then to lecture the Loompopian on

the way to treat prisoners. That would have to wait. Harry dropped two ropes, and signalled that all was clear.

The bare feet of the natives made no noise as they got on the deck and lay down. Harry waited till Dick was up, and whispered to him, "Watch the hatchways." He glanced along his line of black fighting men. A dozen pairs of eyes were looking at him impatiently. "Go!" cried Harry.

Like boys running a race they leaped forward, and as their feet pattered across the deck the Chinamen turned. But too late. Before they could draw a weapon the blacks were on them. One spear was hurled forward with terrific strength, bowled over a Chink, and pinned him to the deck as a pin transfixes a butterfly on a piece of cardboard. Harry was keen to save lives, but he could save only three. The remainder were finished off in about two seconds, speared either in their vitals or in the throat, and half had been heaved overboard before Harry could restrain his followers.

"Look out for the hatchways," Dick called suddenly.

Several Chinks had been below serving up ammunition for the eighteen-pounder. These scuttled to a companion-way when they heard the alarm above them, and one of them drew his revolver when he saw Dick waiting to receive him at the top of the stairs. Dick drew back in time, and the bullet whizzed harmlessly past him.

“Stand back out of the line of fire,” Dick cried.

One of the natives threw a dead body down and took a flying leap after it. Four of his friends followed him, and the scrimmage down there resembled a fight with six cats sewn up in a sack. When the Chinks’ bodies were dragged up into the light, Dick noticed that each had a severed windpipe. The Loompopians at close quarters used their spears very effectively for the short jab. Dick remembered the picture of slain men on his map of the Fire Mountain—the severed windpipes and the red, gushing stream.

“Where is Schmidt?” he suddenly asked Harry.

“I haven’t the faintest. I expect he has

scooted with your faked map to get in first at the treasure."

"I am sorry for him if he has." Dick's eyes were on Fire Mountain. The under-side of the cloud of smoke on the summit was reflecting the fiery mass of lava down in the volcano's depths. "He must get up there to take his compass bearing before he can start. And it does not look a healthy spot at present. We have rather lost sight of him."

"And of Sing Lee. Did that long shot of mine knock him out?"

"No. But, by gosh, you should have seen him when he came round. Your shot got him for the second time in the head, and it turned him balmy. He didn't care a cuss about Gus and me after that. He thought it was Schmidt who wounded him, and if he is still living he is not far away from Schmidt. I wouldn't like to be in Schmidt's shoes if he finds him."

"The natives will protect Schmidt. He is their Tua Yala."

"I don't know—— Hallo, what's wrong, Harry?"



The scrimmage.

Harry Eyton was rocking to and fro on his feet.

“Nothing. I—nothing—I got pipped myself with a bullet, and——” He slid slowly to the deck.

It was then that Dick discovered for the first time that Harry had been wounded.

“Oh, you chump!” he exclaimed. “Why

did you not tell me sooner? I say, Harry. Hold on, old man, till I get some stuff for you."

"S'all right."

"You've done all the blessed work this day. You have cleared up Loompopo."

"Not—till we have Schmidt and Sing Lee fixed."

"You're right. We've got to be sure about them. Now, steady on. Hi, white boss gone dicky. Get water."

Dick, with the help of Gus, began to render first aid to their friend, and while they were busy they both heard the distant chanting which broke out on the shore.

"Tua Yala! Tua Yala!"

"That's Schmidt they're worshipping," remarked Gus. "He is crawling out now when the dirty work's done."

"I know," said Dick grimly. "We'll see about Tua Yala as soon as we can get Harry into the boat. Unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Sing Lee is mighty keen to interview Tua Yala. He may fix him first."

CHAPTER XVIII

TUA YALA

THE first streaks of dawn were showing when Dick and his party, having left a guard on board the captured ship, rowed in and landed on the island. Their first glimpse of the shore showed them how complete their victory had been. The Chinese ship was theirs, and the beach was littered with Chinese dead.

“Dick,” cried Gus joyfully, “you have done what the gov’nor sent you out to do. These Chinks will trouble the island no more. Loompopo is free.”

Dick could not answer at first. When he did speak he said :

“I haven’t done—we have done it. I could never have pulled the thing off if it hadn’t been for you two.”

“ When you’re both quite finished with the sob stuff, we can get on with the good work,” said Harry. “ We can’t hand out any bouquets till we’ve settled with old Schmidt, and the chances are that he will let daylight into some of us yet before he is finished. Hush ! What is that ? ”

They had approached the village, and they could hear the chanting of the natives at the same old refrain :

“ Tua Yala ! Tua Yala ! Tua Yala ! ”

“ You hear that,” Harry murmured. “ Schmidt has come back again, and is laying up trouble for us. If you two go on, I’ll scout around and see if Sing Lee is anywhere about. I hope to find him among some of those stiff ones.”

Dick blazed with anger when he and Gus entered the village. Now that the fighting was over, Schmidt had come out of his hidey-hole and was lording it over the natives as he had done before. He was seated on a raised seat of branches, a crown of hibiscus flowers had been placed on his head, and he was being regaled with offerings of choice fruits. As

Dick strode into the courtyard the singing ceased, and the natives waited to hear what he had to say.

“Where is Queen Selulla?” Dick cried. “And where is the queen’s interpreter? Listen.”

They squatted on their haunches to hear him.

“Queen Selulla and people of Loompopo, the Knight of the Fire Mountain speaks to you. When the queen sent her message, I hastened with my companions over the big waters to help you. Last night we fought. Your warriors were very brave. They fought like white men. And the yellow men are like fallen trees.” He pointed to the dead on the beach, and a cry of joy rose from his hearers.

“Listen.” He pointed to the ship. “We have won their ship, and the big gun that thunders is ours.” Again a cry arose, but Dick stilled it. “We have done what Queen Selulla asked us to do. But where was this man while your warriors were fighting like white men?” His hand was stretched out towards Schmidt, and all eyes were turned upon him. “He was hiding his ugly old head in a hole. He did not

fight. He was afraid. His heart was water. And now you have him here again. He must go. He must be kept a prisoner till he is tried for murder. If you do this, good ; if you will not do it, I shall make the big gun thunder. The Knight of the Fire Mountain has spoken."

The natives seemed to be very much puzzled at what Dick had said. A babel of tongues broke out, and fingers pointed first at Dick, then at Schmidt. Finally the interpreter, who had been talking excitedly to the queen, held up his hand for silence.

"Queen Selulla no savvy. Black man no savvy. You Knight of Fire Mountain, good, plenty fight. Him no fight. Him Tua Yala."

"Tua Yala ! Tua Yala !" the people cried.

Schmidt, who had been pale and nervous while being reminded of the murder he had committed, now leered with triumph.

"You are beat," he cried to Dick. "These niggers will lick my boots if I ask them, and I am going up there now in spite of you, curse the three of you. I am going up to the summit to get my bearings and go on for the treasure. These niggers will carry me all the way, and if

you try to interfere they will tear you limb from limb. The ivory idol is opening up the way for me."

The man was almost mad with greed and excitement. As he drew out the ivory idol and held it out towards Fire Mountain, the excitement among the natives became intense. They formed a bodyguard round him to protect him from Dick's anger.

"Tua Yala! Tua Yala!"

"Let him go," Gus advised Dick. "We can't do very much at present, and the map he has is a faked one, and will send him off in the wrong direction. By the time he comes back we can have our own plans made."

"Sing Lee has escaped," Harry announced, coming up at that moment. "I don't see him down there among the stiffs."

"I bet he's chasing around the island for Schmidt," Dick said. "And I hope these two meet. It would save us a lot of bother. What do you think we should do, Gus?"

"When in doubt, have a good tuck-in and a bath. And I'm dying for sleep."

"Good idea," said Harry. "Let's have an

hour or two of shut-eye. Let Schmidt chase himself round for two or three days. By the time he comes back we should have Queen Selulla talked over to our side."

They made signs for food, and a dozen natives ran to supply their needs, and while they ate they saw Schmidt setting out on his fruitless errand. Four black men were carrying him in a palanquin on their shoulders. He paid no attention to the three chums as he was borne past them. His eyes were glittering with excitement as he set out to grasp Loompopo's millions. In one hand he was grasping the ivory idol, in the other he was holding a little compass which would show the way once he had reached the summit.

"I'll never forgive myself for letting him bag the ivory idol," Dick groaned.

"Oh, cheer up," cried Gus. "You never know your luck. Schmidt! Cheerio, old boy; send us a postcard, will you?"

The fat man made no reply in words. But, stretching out his leg, he kicked savagely at one of his bearers to hurry him on.

That afternoon it was quite impossible for

the three chums to snatch more than an hour's sleep in their hut. After the sun had reached zenith the heat was intense. Not a breath of wind stirred. With their singlets clammy with sweat they tossed from side to side, and tried to sleep; but it was like trying to sleep in an oven. And the last straw was added to their discomfort when a mighty yell rose from a hundred men outside.

“Tua Yala! Tua Yala!”

“Oh lor’,” groaned Gus. “I’m going out to biff somebody. Why the dickens can’t they let us have a blink of beauty sleep?”

When they went outside they found the atmosphere had changed. The sun was obscured behind clouds of smoke and vapour vomited forth by the volcano. A low rumble like distant thunder came from the ground beneath them.

“It looks as if the thing is going to break out,” Harry said. “That’s why the blacks are getting so excited. No, look! Look! There’s Schmidt almost at the top, and there’s some one after him.” He hastily focused his glasses, and cried out with excitement, “Great Scott! It’s Sing Lee, and he is all out to get

at Schmidt. Have a peeper through these, Dick, while I get the other glasses from our kit."

The natives in the village, whose eyes were trained to long distances, could observe every incident in the drama being played out on Fire Mountain, and once the chums had their glasses fixed they too could follow every detail.

Schmidt was within two hundred feet of the top, and was belabouring his bearers to make them go faster. But behind them another figure was hastening, a man with white bandages swathed round his head. Maddened by pain and thirst and by an insatiable desire for revenge, Sing Lee was leaping from rock to rock to claim his victim. Just for a moment the sun burst through the cloud and was reflected on the long, curved blade which Sing Lee was grasping in his hand.

"He's catching up," cried Dick. "He's only a hundred yards behind. Eighty yards. He'll catch Schmidt as sure as guns. Oh, I say, these black idiots are actually going to fight for Schmidt. It's Sing Lee against the lot."

"Let them rip," said Gus calmly.

When Sing Lee was within thirty yards of the party, Schmidt's bearers set down the palanquin and turned round to warn off the pursuer. Sing Lee ignored them. His eyes were fixed on Schmidt as he still leaped forward, fingering at his blade. Then like a wild cat he sprang, but even as he sprang one of the blacks drew back his arm and hurled his spear with terrific force straight at the Chinaman's body. The point pierced to the left of the breast-bone and entered deep into the heart, and when Sing Lee fell backward the spear remained sticking upright in his body. The black man ran to retrieve his weapon and finish off the victim.

"Good heavens!" cried Dick. "He's sticking Sing Lee in the throat now."

The black man wrenched out his spear and with a quick jab thrust it into the Chinaman's throat—the punishment of all who intrude rashly on the sacred slopes of the mountain.

A low murmur of excitement ran round the group of natives in the village. They had watched a man being done to death. But none of them moved. None of them spoke. All

eyes were fixed intently on the sacred person of old Schmidt, a criminal and murderer among white men, but to black men a god, a Tua Yala.

Leaving Sing Lee's body lying where it fell, Schmidt's party pushed on at full speed to the top of the mountain. As they drew nearer to the summit the black men became filled with superstitious terror of the mighty evil spirit rumbling in the depths of the volcano. The monster was threatening to burst forth from its prison and deal out death and fiery destruction. But for Schmidt the volcano did not exist. From his crazy brain, time and place and everything on earth was blotted out, everything except his dreams of glittering treasure. Springing from the palanquin, he bent over his map and adjusted his compass to take his bearings. His followers fell on their knees beside him. The great white man was doing something magic to stop the volcano.

Down in the village all were watching Schmidt. They could see his frenzied haste, could see him kick one of the black men savagely in the face when he got in his way.



Headlong down into the heart of the volcano.

Then the three chums held their breath with horror.

As Schmidt on the brink of the fiery chasm set his eye to the prismatic compass, a black

man rose from his knees, took up his spear, and goaded Schmidt in the small of the back. He took a step forward in agony, missed his footing, clutched wildly at the empty air, and tumbled headlong down into the heart of the volcano. A mighty cry rose from the group in the village, and every man threw himself to the ground and rubbed his forehead in the dust.

“Tua Yala ! Tua Yala !”

“Look !” cried Dick.

As if by magic an answer to their prayer had come. A fresh wind sprang up from the sea, and the heavy pall of smoke parted like a curtain. The sun shone forth. Life began to stir again in the forests of the island. They could hear a bird piping to his mate.

“Tua Yala ! Tua Yala !” The chanting of the people changed to a high note of thankfulness, and as the chums gazed from one to the other a new sound came to their ears.

From far out at sea a droning came nearer and nearer, and a small black speck like a bird grew bigger and bigger.

“This is a plane coming,” cried Harry.
“Get these people back into the wood. If it’s

a Chink plane it may bomb us. Get them in, Dick. Wait, I can see the marking. Have a look. Do you see the red, white, and blue circles on the wings? Hurrah, it's a British plane ! ”

CHAPTER XIX

A NEW ALLY ARRIVES

AS the plane drew nearer, Harry Eyton noted its movements with professional interest.

"It's a British machine all right, a seaplane, a four-seater. Hallo, they're circling round the ship to have a squint at it. Dick, you chump, we've forgotten to strike the Chinese flag. They may drop a bomb on the ship. Hurry down to the beach and light a fire."

The pilot of the seaplane was flying warily round the ship in the bay, which was still flying a white flag bearing a green dragon rampant. Dick and Harry ran at full speed, with Gus hobbling behind, and soon a column of smoke was rising from a fire of green branches.

"That will show them how the wind is," said Harry. "Wave your khaki shirt, Dick, to let

them see us. There he goes. He will land with the wind at his tail. Oh, well done, sir." The plane descended in a long spiral curve, straightened out, skimmed over the water, and came to rest two hundred yards from the shore. The occupants of the plane were suspicious, and the barrel of a machine gun was kept pointing towards the ship.

"Hallo!" bawled Harry, and an answer echoed over the sea.

"Hallo!"

"We're British. There's no danger."

A man could be seen standing up in the plane, and he shouted:

"Is Trepington there?"

"My hat," murmured Gus. "It's my guv'nor.—Yes, dad! I'm here."

"Then why the dickens are you not sending out a boat?"

"Right-o. Half a mo'." As they signed to the natives for a boat, Gus remarked to his chums: "The guv'nor sounds rather peeved. I expect he's ratty because I forgot to send him a postcard."

In ten minutes Lord Trepington and a little,

wizened old gentleman with him were speeding shoreward, and as soon as the boat grounded Lord Trepington shouted to Gus :

“ Here, you young blighter, what do you mean by scuttling off like this ? Where is Stannard ? Are you both safe ? ”

In spite of his pretended anger he was heartily glad to find them both alive, and he wrung their hands. Dick introduced their pal.

“ This is Harry Eyton, sir. He has helped us lots since he joined us, and he saved our lives last night.”

“ Harry Eyton, I am glad to meet you, sir. When I have heard the story from those young rascals I shall know how to thank you.”

“ How—how is my father, sir ? ” Dick asked the question anxiously, because he had heard no news from his father since leaving home.

“ He’s not too bad, and he is going to pull through in spite of that nasty knock he got. But he is worrying to have news about you. I arrived home from Africa a week after you left, and was thunderstruck to know you both were on the way to Loompopo. Colonel Stannard could tell me only something vague



"Hallo!" bawled Harry.

about an island, an ivory idol, Chinese pirates, and some fellow called Smith. I came on full speed behind you. That ship in the bay looked very suspicious."

"It's a British ship," said Dick. "But I'm sorry I forgot to strike the Chinese flag and hoist the Union Jack."

Lord Trepington did not answer. He had caught sight of what had seemed to be logs lying about the beach. Now he saw they were Chinese corpses.

"There was a bit of a scrap here last night, sir," Dick said. "We haven't had time yet to tidy things up. If you and this gentleman will come up to the village we shall see about getting you something to eat, and we can explain everything to you afterwards."

"Good idea. This is Professor Joyce-Jones, an authority on the language and customs of the people round this way. Our pilot is still in the plane, covering us with his gun. Perhaps, professor, you will be good enough to tell those fellows in their own lingo to get some ropes and lend us a hand to get the machine in."

The joy of the Loompopians was intense when they heard one of the white men speak fluently in their own tongue. With whoops of delight some ran for ropes, others to tell the queen of their distinguished visitors. And when the moon rose again on Loompopo it looked down upon a scene of rejoicing. All signs of carnage had been cleared away. A huge bonfire blazed

in the open space within the royal enclosure. In its lurid light black men, daubed with red clay, were fighting their battle over again to the incessant beating of drums.

“ Tum-tum-tum-tum.”

Suddenly the noise ceased and the cry arose :
“ The queen ! ”

Immediately the blacks sat down to show respect, and the white men sprang to their feet. The queen's prime minister stepped into the circle of ruddy light and began to sing. At intervals the people joined in, and as a climax they rose and danced in circles. Quicker and quicker went the chanting, quicker and quicker went the dance, till “ Yaa ! ” One roar rose in unison, and in an instant all sank to the ground and remained silent and still like images carved out of ebony.

“ A song of triumph,” said Professor Joyce-Jones. “ Something about white men being braver than the lion, bigger than the elephant, and swifter than the bird.”

“ Let's return the compliment. Now, lads,” said Lord Trepington, “ join in the national anthem and give it voice.”

They stood in a row and sang as loud as they could, and at the end finished by giving three rousing British cheers. This seemed to please Queen Selulla. She approached them and rubbed her forehead against the foreheads of her guests.

“Eat and drink,” she said. “Queen Selulla bids you welcome. She may not eat with you, since the laws of her country prevent her doing so. But she will stay and watch the white man eat.”

This the professor translated, and Lord Trempington said to Dick :

“Say something in reply. No, no, it is up to you. You have been in command here, and have done so jolly well that I am not going to butt in now. But you must get her majesty to go away, or we won’t be able to swallow a mouthful.”

“The queen speaks well,” said Dick. “But we have a custom that white men cannot eat in presence of a queen. To-morrow we shall seek audience of the queen when our new allies have rested.”

The queen smiled when the message was

given to her, and said something about Lord Trepington.

"What does she say?" he asked the professor.

"She says that you are her bird-man."

"Some bird," grinned Gus, looking at his dad's protuberant waistcoat.

"Be quiet," said his father in mock severity. "You cannot appreciate beauty. Tell her, professor, that we shall give her a trip in the bird-machine to-morrow."

When her majesty had withdrawn with stately dignity, Professor Joyce-Jones had much to say on the history of the Loompopians; but Gus was impatient to hear only one thing.

"I wish, sir, that you would tell us the meaning of a phrase we have heard often since coming here."

"I shall, if I can."

"Tua Yala."

"Ah. Tua Yala or Tua Yola, because we find both variations. It is a phrase used in connection with native worship. In some parts they worship the sea or a river. Here they may worship the volcano. They believe it is an evil

spirit trying to devour men. The evil spirit can be appeased by a victim, so the natives make little idols in clay or wood, and offer them once a year, usually at a season of full moon."

"Are the idols sometimes made of ivory?" Dick asked.

"The material would not matter very much. The evil spirit mistakes this for a human figure and is supposed to be quiet. Long ago they used to offer a real, living person once a year. That was called Tua Yala, a living sacrifice. But they don't do that nowadays."

"They offered a Tua Yala here three hours ago," said Dick quietly.

"Did they throw idols into the volcano?"

"They threw a living white man into the volcano."

It was good to note how the dry-as-dust professor quickened at once into lively interest.

"You mean to say, boy, that Tua Yala is still practised on this island? Tell us what you saw."

When the story was finished the professor began to take notes in his notebook, and Lord Trepington said :

"I see now why your father raved so much about the ivory idol, Dick. You had to use it only as a last resource to clear an enemy from your path by letting him get possession of the ivory idol. This scoundrel Schmidt stole it, found how powerful it was, but did not know how it would end. Your father is in a blue funk lest you should have appeared here with the thing in your hand."

"It would have been the end of you," said the professor. "No power on earth could have saved you from the doom of the idol. The natives would have looked upon you as a heaven-sent gift, coming especially at a time when the volcano is active."

"The strangest thing of all was that the Tua Yala worked. The smoke immediately cleared away, and we have heard no rumblings since."

"A coincidence."

But as Dick lay in his hut that night, and thought of all the mysterious things that had happened since he landed on the island, thought of the ghastly fate that had overtaken Schmidt, of the speedy death that had come to Sing Lee,

he could not help shivering. And lying awake and gazing out into the ghostly moonlight, he almost began to believe in Tua Yala himself: the island was so quiet and peaceful, and a short time ago it had been the scene of so much horror and bloodshed.

“ I’ll be glad to get home,” he said to himself. “ To-morrow I must get a message somehow back to dad, and if the queen has no more work for me to do, I’ll be glad to see home again.”

CHAPTER XX

GOOD-BYE TO THE TREASURE

DICK'S first care in the morning was to send back the seaplane to Singapore with a message for his father which was to go by cable, to assure him that all was well ; and that done, he found the queen awaited them. Her request was a strange one. The white men had helped her to rid her kingdom of Chinese pirates, now she wanted to know if they would help her to get rid of her treasure.

“ Treasure hidden in the earth is like a sick man in his bed,” she said. “ It is of no use. Can the white man take my treasure and get me instead a big ship with a gun that thunders ? Will the white man come and look at my treasure ? ”

When they signified their eagerness to accom-

pany her, she took only two of her most trusty attendants, and they set out with her. After three hours' arduous toil in climbing up the ridge which formed the backbone of the island, they descended on the other side to the edge of a precipice skirting the seashore. Here the queen uncoiled a rope, and bade one of her men lash it to a tree and throw the other end over the cliff. Peering over the giddy height, they could see the sea beating on cruel rocks far beneath. Without a moment's hesitation the queen lowered herself over the edge of the chasm and let herself down hand under hand till she disappeared from sight beneath a mass of rock which jutted out.

It was not a descent that Dick would have risked in normal times ; but when a lady—and a queen—had done it, he did not draw back.

“ I'll go first,” he said. “ And when I am down safe I shall tie a message to the rope.”

Shutting his eyes lest he should become dizzy with the height, he carefully lowered himself over the edge till his body was hanging clear. The rope scorched his hands as he went down slowly, but he clung for his life and went down

foot by foot, past the bulge in the rock, till he was opposite the mouth of a cave where Queen Selulla was standing. Swinging on the rope, he got nearer and nearer to her till she reached out her strong arm and pulled him in by the belt. Then after a minute to regain his breath and blow on his fingers, he wrote a message on a leaf of his notebook and tied it to the rope.

“Don’t risk sliding down. Hitch the rope under your arms, and be sure that one man stays on top to see that we get up again.”

When all but one native had come down, the queen lit torches and led the way into the cave. The walls were about six feet high and three feet wide, and were as smooth as if they had been fashioned by a plane. After stretching thirty yards, the corridor opened out into a wide chamber in which seven sea-chests bound in brass were piled up. None of them were locked, and when the queen lifted the lid of the first, Lord Trepington uttered a low cry of amazement. The chest was filled to the top with rubies, which beamed a bright red in the torch-light. An awed silence fell upon them as they opened each of the chests and gazed upon

fabulous wealth in rubies, diamonds, pearls, emeralds, amethysts, gold and silver. Then Queen Selulla spoke and the professor translated :

“ For five, six, seven hundred years, before the hearts of my people turned to water, our fathers sailed north over the big waters and brought back what they won by their spears. Queen Selulla wants her warriors to be brave again and to sail the seas. Can the white men take those stones and get for her a big ship and a gun that thunders ? ”

“ This stuff would almost buy a whole navy,” Lord Trepington answered.

“ Will the white men take those stones and give Queen Selulla the big ship that lies in the bay ? ”

“ We cannot touch those gems,” said Lord Trepington. “ If we unloaded them on the market, the price of precious stones all over the world would slump and thousands would be ruined. The currencies of the world would be affected. For those stones hundreds of men have died, and hundreds more would die.”

“ If we leave them here,” said Dick, “ more



Filled to the top with rubies.

pirates will soon come after them and raze the island till they find them. If we take them away, we cause more trouble."

"What would you suggest, professor?"

"I beg your pardon. I was not listening. I have been rather interested in the formation of this cave. It has been formed neither by the hand of man nor by the erosion of the sea. I rather suspect it is on a fault line."

He was casting the light of his torch up on the walls of the cavern, and the three chums began to think he was just the slightest bit crazy.

“ A fault line is where the rock has been split in two and one half has slipped bodily downwards. It is a weak part in the earth’s crust.”

Dick and his pals were suspecting there was a weak part in the professor’s crust ; but they said nothing.

“ About those diamonds, professor,” Lord Trepington said somewhat testily. “ Do you think it feasible that we should move them from here ? ”

“ Oh, the diamonds. I do not know about them. But this rock here——”

“ I think we should do nothing at present,” Dick suggested. “ Should we not consult my father first ? He knows about them.”

“ A good idea. But is it safe to leave them in the meantime here ? ”

“ Why not ? The Green Dragon has been scotched, and it will take only a matter of a few weeks till we decide.”

“ Queen Selulla wants a big ship and a gun that thunders.” The professor took time from his examination of the rocks to translate the message.

“She will get it,” said Dick heartily. “If our motor-boat is still in working order I will give her the Chinese junk in a present. Now let’s get out. I won’t feel happy till I have disposed of this treasure. More Chinks will be after it like wasps after a pot of jam.”

With the help of the black Hercules at the top of the cliff they ascended without accident, and a dark cloud in the north warned them to hurry back to the village for shelter. Their bodies were streaming with perspiration as they toiled upwards, and as bursts of hot wind like whiffs from an oven blew from the north, they had to gasp for breath. Then as they reached the crest of the ridge and prepared for a rapid dash home, the full fury of the storm broke on them.

Suddenly a vivid flash of jagged lightning swept along the hillside, so close that they could smell the brimstone. And the vaults of heaven reverberated with a mighty clap of thunder. The force of the shock hurled them to the ground. Beneath them in the forest, giant trees which had stood for five hundred years crashed like matchwood.

“Keep down,” cried Lord Trepington.
“There is——”

Before he could complete his sentence another flash of lightning swept over them. An ominous rumble from the volcano could be heard above the thunder. The whole island seemed to rock beneath their feet. A loud rending sound like thousands of bursting shells came from the direction of Fire Mountain, swept along the length of the island, and passed out to sea. And as they followed the sound with their eyes they were suddenly transfixed with horror. Half a mile of the island's rocky fringe disappeared down into the bowels of the earth. A living wall of water leaped in from the sea and swamped the huge cavity.

“The treasure,” cried Dick. “The treasure. It's gone.”

It was only too true. The fault of which the professor had spoken had developed instantaneously. The weakest part of the earth's crust had collapsed. The treasure was buried for ever beneath millions of tons of rock and water.

With white scared faces they gazed from one

to the other in wonder. The professor recovered first, and sat up and calmly drew out his notebook.

"That solves our little problem about the treasure," said Gus. "It has gone where the good niggers go. What is Queen Selulla saying now, professor?"

Her face was working with emotion, and tears stood in her eyes as she spoke vehemently to the professor.

"She is not concerned about the treasure. She is saying it is good-bye for her to the big ship and the gun that thunders."

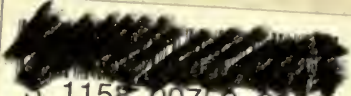
"It is not," said Dick. "She bought that ship while we stood in the cave. It is hers if it is still floating."

And so ended the strange adventures which befell Dick and his chums when they went on their quest to Loompopo. By sheer grit they had won through in the teeth of the Green Dragon and the wily Schmidt. Queen Selulla got her ship. Two villains met the doom they deserved. Dick, Gus, and Harry had proved their manhood in the face of danger. And manhood is worth more than treasure.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE PRESS OF THE PUBLISHERS






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